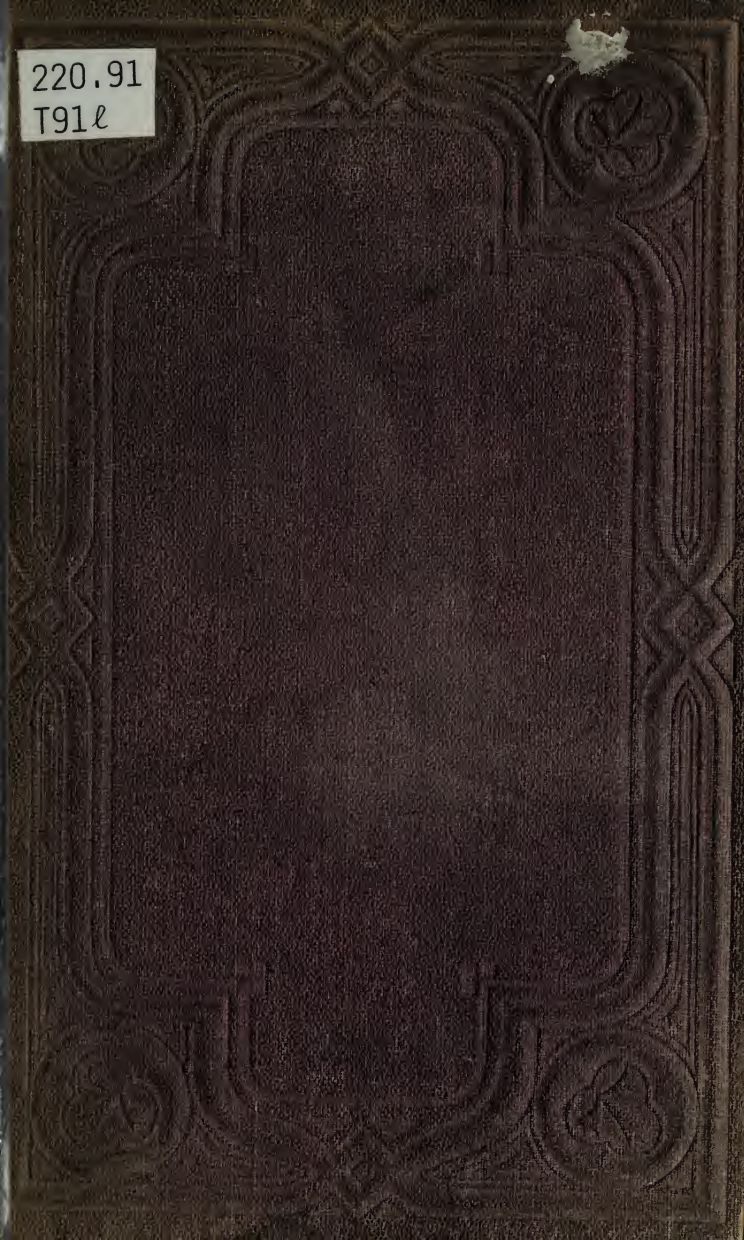


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FORDS OF THE KISHON.



THE
LAKES AND RIVERS
OF
THE BIBLE.

By the Late

REV. W. K. TWEEDIE, D.D.,
Author of "The Early Choice," "Seed-time and Harvest," &c.

" Their vines a shadow to their race shall yield,
And the same hand that sowed shall reap the field ;
The swain in barren deserts with surprise
Sees lilies spring and sudden verdure rise ;
And starts, amidst the thirsty wilds to hear
New falls of water murmuring in his ear."

PORA.

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LESSONS for the better country are linked to every portion of the Messiah's Land. From the swellings of Jordan, which tell of the believer's terrors and troubles at death, to the brook of Siloam or the dew upon a thousand hills; from the cedar that is on Lebanon, to the graceful Huleh lily, which is perhaps the flower to which the Saviour appealed as more than a match for Solomon in all his glory; from the Dead Sea, that emblem of a thousand things in the history of man, to the fresh springs which spread life and beauty wherever they flow; from the quiet habits of the husbandman, to the bloody plunderings of the robber; from seed-time, summer, autumn, and winter; from mountain tops and arid wadies; from Zion hill to Hermon; from Gerizim and Ebal, Moriah and Olivet; from city and hamlet; from caves and countless ruins; from Jerusalem, the widowed, the forlorn, the down-trodden, to Jericho, which has so completely ceased to be, that its real site can scarcely be detected; from mountain streams and glades of oak; from blighted plains and

fertile fields; from wild beasts of fiercest character, to turtle doves, the gentlest and most sad of birds; from the eagle as he soars, to the sparrow as he twitters; from behemoth (perhaps the buffalo), to the coneys, the "feeble folk;"—in a word, through all nature, animate and inanimate, the Bible stamps lessons for eternity upon the objects of time in Palestine. It is the supposition of some, that God, in his holy foresight, constructed the Promised Land so as to fit it to serve such purposes, or to teach such lessons—types and emblems of spiritual things and eternal realities he designed to exhibit in abundance there. Before the Bible was all written, or even before the lives of the patriarchs were led, the country promised to the fathers was adapted to the gracious ends of the Eternal. It became the medium of embodying spiritual things before the eye, that as long as sun and moon endure man may be gathering wisdom among those mountains, or by those streams, just as we gather it from the Bible itself when the Spirit has become the teacher of the soul.

And such is the result of all this, that we can scarcely lift up our eyes in the Land without noticing something to shed light upon the Bible, or to render it at once more intelligible and more precious. Indeed there are many things which cannot be understood except by a reference to the sights, the habits, the climate, or the productions of that country. And if the Book be indeed becoming more ascendant among the sons of men, one reason perhaps is that the Land where it was for the most part composed has been more thoroughly

explored, and the results brought to bear upon the written word.

One example will suffice for all. Every reader of the Bible has been perplexed to understand some of the visions of Ezekiel. Their machinery is so complex, and their symbols are so peculiar, that desperate fetches have sometimes been made in men's attempts to explain their meaning. One of the prophetic visions, however, seems to receive a practical illustration at Jerusalem, which may render it plain to all. He, for example (xlvi. 1), saw waters flowing from the threshold of a house. And it is now ascertained that streams flowed from under the ancient Temple. According to the vision, moreover, they flowed eastward, that is, into the wady Kidron—as the waters of Jerusalem still do—and down that wondrous gorge to the Dead Sea. The increase of the stream, as depicted by Ezekiel, is sometimes realized in that glen; while the fertility that followed and fringed the flowing waters was a phenomenon as common as such waters themselves. Now all that, as predicted, pointed forward to the times of refreshing which awaited the Church; or rather, the stream flowing on and augmenting evermore, from the Temple to the Dead Sea, whose waters it healed, betokens the progress of truth and the life-giving effects which it produces in our world. Theory after theory may be formed regarding Ezekiel's vision, but some who have been upon the spot, and looked at the prophecy on the one hand and the scenery of the Kidron on the other, have been irresistibly led to the conclusion that the scenery is the key

to the prediction. The healing of the waters of the Dead Sea is an emblem of the healing effects of truth in our world.

In the pages which follow an attempt is made to link the explanation of Scripture with the description of the scenes which are visited. The chief interest of many of the events recorded in the Bible gathers round its Rivers and its Lakes. It becomes more and more luminous and vivid in its meaning when studied amid the scenes where its events transpired.

The contents of this volume are gathered from many. Dr. Robinson's "Researches in Palestine,"—a book which would be exhaustive if it were possible to exhaust the land at all; Lynch's "Narrative of the American Exploring Expedition to the Jordan and the Dead Sea;" Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine;" Van de Velde's "Narrative of a Journey through Syria and Palestine;" "The Land and the Book," by Dr. Thomson; Dr. Kitto's works; Dr. W. Smith's "Dictionary of the Bible," with many more, have furnished the facts; and the volume is now sent forth in the hope that it may help to make the Bible at once plainer and more precious, and the salvation which was accomplished at Jerusalem more and more the rejoicing of those who would dwell at last on the banks of that river which will for ever gladden the city of our God.





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THE LAKES AND RIVERS OF THE BIBLE.

INTRODUCTION.

“THE Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land ; a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of the valleys and hills.” Such are the words which were employed to describe the Land of Promise long before the people to whom it was made sure had entered its borders. All who have explored that land with care, or described its climate, its hills, its valleys and streams, agree that the prophet’s announcement is amply borne out by the facts of the case. We are told, indeed, that the number of fountains is prodigious. They are called “the eyes” of the land, as they constitute much of its beauty ; and they form one main cause of its fertility. The volume of some of these springs is incredible. There are some mountain villages which possess hundreds of fountains sending forth brooks which wind and bubble along the hill-sides, to find their way to the valleys, and spread verdure and fer-

tility wherever they flow. It is even said that an extensive region—from Joppa to Gaza, and perhaps further south—lies over a subterranean lake or river; and the theory is countenanced by the fact that all around Joppa, at least, water is found at the depth of from ten to forty feet wherever a well is dug. The sight of fountains and streams occasions a joy to the traveller here such as those who are accustomed to the weeping climate of the West and the North can scarcely understand. Our fertility depends much upon the rain which falls; that of Syria on the springs which rise, and many hundreds of them may be counted, scattered in rich profusion over the land. The head of the Dog River, and of the River of Beirût; of the Damur, the Owely, the Zahrany, the Kurn, the Litany, Zahleh, Ainjar, and Mushgarah; the Ras el Ain, near Tyre; the Nahr Uzziyeh, with its tortuous, wild, and wooded gorge; the fountains of the Naamany and Kabery, on the Plain of Acre; the noble fountains of Musheirifeh; of the Kishon, at Jenin, Lejjun, and elsewhere; of the Zerka, near Cæsarea; the Murubbah, in Wady Surar, on the west coast; the Ras, in Sharon; the Ain es Sultan, at Jericho; En-gedi, near the Dead Sea; the springs and streams of Nablous; Solomon's Pools, Belad, Wady Urtas, with many more, are enumerated as at once crowding and fertilizing the land. Nay, so rife are these fountains, that one a little north of Ruad,—the Arvad of the Bible,—on the shores of the Great Sea, rises up from the depths of the ocean; and such is the volume of water which ascends to the surface there, that it makes the sea boil like a caldron.

Further: on the coast near Sidon, and just on the margin of the land as actually possessed by the Hebrews, there is a district which may well be visited for the peculiar abundance of its springs and streams. The ruins scattered around, the rock tombs, and other vestiges of a crowded but long extinct population, might also occupy our attention; but, keeping in view the rivers of the region, there are two which deserve to be specially noticed. In a wild gorge near the south end of Lebanon a copious spring bursts out, called the Fountain of the Cup. It is the source of the River Zahrany, already mentioned, which has been described as "the flowery," and is large enough to be spanned by a bridge of three arches not far from Sidon. Its snow-cold water was carried to that city in ancient times by means of a canal, which seems to have been enough to have baffled even the boldest engineers of modern times. A channel was hewn in the solid rock, the river near its source was turned into it, and carried downwards to the city, spanning deep ravines upon high arches by the way. At some places the water was led along frightful cliffs, where goats (it is said) could scarcely keep their feet. After running thus for some distance, another aqueduct from the source of a second river, Er Rahib, joined the former, and the two courses were then led downward by the same line, but the one about fifteen feet above the other. The engineering there is so difficult, and at the same time so perfect, that it should be described in the words of an eye-witness. "The system of arches," Dr. Thomson says,* "by which these works were car-

* "The Land and the Book," chap. xi.

ried across the ravines and rivers is still almost perfect, and the cliffs to which they cling are absolutely perpendicular for miles together. As there are no traces of arches by which the water was led across the low plain up to the city, it has been conjectured that the Sidonian engineers were acquainted at that early age with the principle in hydrostatics that water will rise to the level of its source." In truth, the course of these streams and the works along them prompt us to wonder at the progress made in such things by the men of remotest antiquity. Nothing has yet been discovered to indicate the age of these works. They were old when *our* antiquity began; and at some places the wall "looks like an unbroken crystalline rock, as compact as the mountain limestone above it."

Moreover, the Eastern word "Wady" may be said to be now domesticated in the English language. It means a hollow, a valley, or depression, worn or washed by mountain torrents, flowing perhaps only for a few months or weeks in the year. For a short time after rain has fallen, these wadies present the appearance of rushing streams, and a dry channel may suddenly be transformed into a roaring torrent. The Wady Shellal, for instance, "the valley of the cataracts," at some seasons well deserves its name; but, in general, the wadies are dry, and tantalizing to the wayfarer,—the more so because of the traces of water which remain after the current has disappeared.* There are, of course, wadies which are not "waterless rivers," but where the streams are fed by fountains, and are therefore perennial, like the

* Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," chap. i.

Wady el Ain and the Wady Feiran, in the peninsula of Sinai.

In such a country as Canaan the fervour of sunshine would scorch and wither up all vegetation, and at some places it actually does so: but that fervour is very largely counteracted by the abundance and the copious flow of the streams and fountains of the land; so that it enjoys a tropical fertility by means of more than tropical supplies of water. In a word, these springs and fountains form one of the signalizing characteristics of the country. There is, moreover, reason to believe that such hidden reservoirs and the supplies which they yield were even more copious in former times than in our age. The visitor to Jerusalem cannot journey far outside the city now without carrying with him a supply of water; yet we know that so copious was the store in that vicinity in former times, that, in the prospect of an invasion by the king of Assyria, Hezekiah summoned the strength of his land to aid him in stopping the fountains, and diverting the brook that ran in the suburbs of Jerusalem.

One of these fountains, or rather a group of them, is so remarkable that it may here be mentioned as an illustration of the copiousness of the supplies. About thirty furlongs from Tyre stand the pools already referred to, called Ras el Ain, believed to have been the source whence that queenly city was supplied with water. There are four reservoirs at the place, with walls of great thickness, and from 15 to 20 feet high. They were built to raise the water of the fountains sufficiently high to admit of their being conveyed

by aqueducts to the city. Some carry back their antiquity as far as the days of Solomon, others ascribe them to Alexander the Great; but be their antiquity even greater still, or be their founder who he may, the copious supply of water from these fountains (now used only to turn some mills) attests once more the character of the land. The largest pool is octagonal, and about 80 feet in diameter and 20 in depth; another pool is 52 feet by 47, and 12 feet deep; another is 52 feet by 36, and 16 deep. The stones are so large and the walls so thick—in some cases 23 feet—that these fountains may remain for thousands of years to come, unless they be purposely destroyed.

But water under every form, as well as in lakes and streams, is signalized in the East. It is familiarly known that wells have there been famous in all ages. There are some at Gaza not less than 150 feet deep; and the word Beer, “a well,” enters into the name of many places;—in short, such stores of the fluid, which is there truly the water of life, became the centres of much that now enters into the history of the land, from Beer-sheba, viz., “the well of the oath,” famed in Abraham’s day, to the Well of Samaria in that of Christ. At such a spot Eliezer met Rebekah, Jacob met Rachel, and Moses Zipporah. There battles were fought, and matches made in patriarchal times; and there to this day may patriarchal scenes be seen renewed, fac-similes of those of four thousand years ago. Thither brigands hasten to plunder, and there wayfarers must either watch or fight. There, in short, life in the East may sometimes be studied to far greater advantage than in

the tent itself. The well at Bethlehem and that of Nazareth, for example, have let travellers know what would never have been elsewhere learned.

But, in addition to all that is real and refreshing in these supplies of water, there are fictitious appearances, as tantalizing as they are lovely—we refer to the mirage. It is sometimes seen in great perfection, and even those who are familiar with the phenomenon in Palestine sometimes find it difficult to resist the impression of reality. We may as well try to grasp a shadow as to reach the mirage,—it flies or it melts as we pursue it. It is not merely the cup, but a whole lake or sea of Tantalus; and in the East the agonies of thirst are sometimes immeasurably augmented by the deception. How refreshing, after such a phantom-pool, to arrive at the Ras el Ain, the Ain es Sultan, or at En-gedi!

It need scarcely be said that this peculiarity of Canaan has stamped itself largely upon the Bible. Allusion after allusion, by seer, by psalmist, and evangelist, tells how keen was the Hebrew eye in discovering the beauty which lingered around their fountains and their streams. From that outburst of confidence in God, the 46th Psalm, which tells of a river whose streams make glad the city of our God, down to the close of Scripture, where we read of “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb,” everything betokens the joy of the Jews amid the streams of their land. The peace of believers is compared to the flowing of a river. Mention is made of the river of God’s pleasure. The sorrows of great mourning are compared to the

rush of a river. A good man is likened to a tree planted by the rivers of water. The Saviour is commended to mourners by comparing him to rivers of water in a dry place. Even the heavenly state is supposed to be rendered more attractive or more intelligible to man by such allusions, for the Lamb is to lead the redeemed to "living fountains of water." All these things enable us to comprehend how fully the Eastern notions of man's beatitude are connected with the idea of streams and fountains. To be denied a sight of the rivers, floods, and brooks, is to be doomed to misery ; while the emblem of perfect felicity or great prosperity is sought and found in "judgment running down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." The same taste for beauty, intensified by the climate, which taught one of our poets to speak of him who "pored upon the brook that bubbled by," and another to sing of "the brook that flowed fast by the oracle of God," and hundreds to make their verses vocal with the praise of many waters, becomes religion in the case of the sons of Abraham. In later times, at least, the "places where prayer was wont to be made" were erected by the side of some stream ; and he who does not love to wander by the green margin of brooks and rivers is scarcely prepared to understand these deep, rich, and most appropriate allusions of the Bible.

The reasons for this passionate attachment to waters are manifold, and need scarcely be referred to again. A traveller from a land of rains is traversing the Wady Fasacl, to the north of Wady Kelt, near Jericho. The further he descends into its depths, from the high

lands to the west, the more glowing and stifling do the winds from the Valley of the Jordan become. The air, one says, seems to be on fire, and all around seems calcined. Thistles, grass, flowers, shrubs, luxuriant in themselves while green, are now white as straw or hay, and five or six feet high. All is dead in vegetation, and threatens death to the wayfarer. But at length a strip of green is beheld. A thicket of wild figs, oleanders, thorny plants, and other shrubs, preserves its greenness and vitality even in that gigantic oven. And the cause of that verdant strip is a solitary fountain of living water, which enables those bushes to brave all that is broiling, and spread their beauties abroad, to bid the panting traveller hope that he also will survive. A little industry can turn the waters of the fountain to account, and nearer the Jordan cucumbers are cultivated by their aid: but both the torrid effects of the unmitigated heat, and the verdant results of the little rill, tell us why brooks are so prized in the land.*

Nor need we wonder at this, when we contemplate the matter under another aspect, and call to mind the effects of thirst in the East. A traveller there once made an experiment for a day in abstaining from the use of water, and has left an account of his feelings upon record. "I resolved," he says, "during one day, to try how long I could endure the cravings of thirst, although we had . . . a sufficient supply of not very palatable water. From six in the morning till our noon-tide meal I was able to abstain without any uncom-

* Van de Velde's "Syria and Palestine," vol. ii. p. 309.

fortable result. At dinner I took just enough to refresh my lips. During the afternoon and evening march the sense of thirst became very painful, and when the sun went down it brought no refreshment; I became feverish with a feeling of oppression in my throat, a burning pulsation at the tips of my fingers, and felt a general restlessness of the whole system, while every thought of my mind was associated with running or springing water. Before I could reach the halting station I called impatiently for drink but it was long before the reaction of the system threw off the effects of the painful experiment." Where men are exposed to such trials from the want of water, its presence is indeed of more value than gold.

But it is a larger view of the subject, to observe that the queenly cities, from Babylon on the Euphrates, and Nineveh on the Tigris, to Rome on the Tiber, and London on the Thames, and Oxford on the Isis, and Cambridge on the Cam, have all derived their resources, or their strength, like a tree that "will bud through the scent of water," from the streams on whose margins they stood or stand. Nay, even Eden needed streams to make its beauty perfect;—so that from that paradise which we have lost, on to the paradise which we hope will be restored, many a joy is floated into the soul of man by the streams which gladden him by their murmurs, or enrich him by their stores. Could we blot from the Bible all the illustrations which are derived from fountains, and brooks, and streams, and rivers, and water under every variety of title, the redemption plan would still be in itself the same, but the

Book which describes it would be deprived of many of its beauties, as well as enfeebled in much of its meaning.

And this condescension to man's weakness, in regard to the *form* of the Bible, does not appear only in that respect—it characterizes the whole of revelation. What could we know of the Holy One, or that God who is a spirit, unless he were described after the manner of man? Who can even tell us what a spirit is, except by saying what it is *not*? Who can convey spiritual impressions into man's dull mind, except by material emblems, or human adumbrations? Hence the mind of God is mercifully revealed to us in human language, by means of human deeds, and hopes, and fears, and feelings. Hence the Unchanging One is spoken of as if he could repent, or be grieved, or change. Hence, above all, "the mystery of godliness," "God manifest in the flesh;" for then only could we "acquaint ourselves with God," when we saw him incarnate in One who was "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person." Upon the same principle, spiritual joys are insinuated into the mind by material emblems;—in the present instance by streams and springs, by dews and fountains. As Palestine was a land proverbial for these, that land becomes a vast commentator on the Bible. It rebukes the idolatry which prompts men to worship the Ganges, the Nile, the Jordan, or the Tiber as a god; but it consecrates the beauty and the attractions which hover around such scenes: they are laid under tribute to Him who is altogether lovely, from whom all beautiful things are emanations, and to whom all such things offer ceaseless

hymns of praise by the very loveliness which enshrines them.

We mean, then, to wander, through the following pages, by the margin of the streams of Scripture, and study there what Inspiration has recorded for guiding man to glory. There, if anywhere, we may find—

“Books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

Would the Apocalypse be read with special relish in Patmos? Has the Epistle to the Romans gladdened many a soul in the city of the popes, though read by stealth, and amid trembling? Then it were no less pleasing to trace the story of Elijah by the Brook Cherith, or of the Baptist by the Jordan. That, however, is a privilege which few can enjoy in person, and the following chapters are designed to aid in forming a correct idea of some of the lake and river scenery of the Bible. Men have gathered wisdom on the slopes of its mountains. They have disinterred many proofs of the Scripture's truth from the ruins which are strewn so thickly over the land of marvels. Its naked but once terraced hills; its fertility, once deemed fabulous, but now amply attested, have all yielded rich and manifold instruction; and we would now glance at its fountains and streams, to learn wisdom by their margins, or become more reverent amid their solemn memories.

“Twere musical but sadly sweet,
Such as when winds and harp strings meet,”

to traverse the widowed land, and trace its past and

abiding decay in connection with the promises of a glory yet to come.

But before proceeding further, it may be well to glance at the Bible's own view of the rivers and streams to which it refers.

It speaks, then, in one or two places, of "The river," in such a way as to indicate that it refers to the Nile. The word employed is peculiar, and except in one case, is always applied to the great river of Egypt.

But the Bible uses a different word when it speaks, for example, of the rivers of Babylon (Ps. cxxxvii. 1). That word is descriptive of artificial channels for water, as well as the brooks and streams of nature.

Again : the Bible often employs a generic word for a stream, a brook, or a torrent, temporary or perennial ; and when the stream flows at all seasons, a word to indicate that characteristic is commonly added. To individualize the brooks of certain districts, they are described by some peculiarity in their current, or by the country through which they flow. For example, "The Brook of the Willows" (Isa. xv. 7), is believed to be the Wady el Ahsy, which descends from the mountains east of the Dead Sea, and enters it at its south-eastern extremity. The Brook Besor (1 Sam. xxx. 9, 10, 21), which means, "the cold," enters the Mediterranean not far from Gaza, and the prophet's narrative shows that it was, at some seasons at least, a considerable torrent. And Kanah is another brook, mentioned in Joshua xvi. 8, as on the boundary between Ephraim and Manasseh. And to name no more, what our translation calls "The river of Egypt," (Num. xxxiv. 5, and else-

where,) is not, as some might suppose, the Nile, but a brook—and the name in Hebrew indicates the fact—which formed the southern limit of the land. It is now called Wady el Arish, from a village of that name, anciently known as Rhinocorura.

It may be added that such valleys as Eshcol, Gerar Zered, and others, are indicated in the Scriptures by a word which means a valley proper, without any necessary reference to flowing water. The last mentioned, or Zered, is called a brook in our translation; and most probably there was a stream, at least at some seasons, in the valley there, as well as in the others which have been mentioned. It is supposed to be the same as Isaiah's "Brook of the Willows," already noticed. But enough regarding these brooks. We need not further specify that of Sorek, or "the vineyards;" or that of Shittim, or "the acacia trees." They were most probably valleys watered by winter torrents, and dry during part of the year. We pass, therefore, to the unquestionable rivers of the Land of Promise.*

Precedence is here given to the Jordan, and in describing its course the narrative may be divided into seven chapters. The first will include the account of the fountain-heads of the Jordan, and its course to Banias; the next will describe the appearance of

* The variety of words used by the Jews for rivers or streams indicated their importance. The following are examples:—

Nahar, river; in the plural,
canals.

Jor, applied chiefly to the Nile.

Shichor, Black River.

Jordan, the Descender.

Nachal, a torrent bed.

Peleg, a stream.

Mical, brook.

And many others.

Tweedie, W. K.

The lakes and rivers of
the Bible. 1864.

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^ A plan for the milk house, by W. A. Foster, H. A. Ruehe, and C. S. Rhode ... [Urbana, Ill.] University of Illinois [1931]

[8]p. incl. diags. 23cm. (University of Illinois. College of agriculture and Agricultural experiment station. Circular 371)

^ 1. Farm buildings. ^ 2. Milk. ^ I. Rhode,

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the river and its vicinity there and thence to Lake Merom and the Huleh; another will conduct us to the Bridge of Jacob's Daughters; the next will embrace the country between that spot and the Sea of Galilee; another will contain a description of that sea and its environs; the next will conduct us down to the Fords, and the Plains of Jericho; and the last will contain an account of the Dead Sea and its vicinity. Excursions up the wadies watered by the Jabbok, the Arnon, and other feeders of the Jordan, will at once bring us acquainted with their beauties, and complete our survey of the eastern borders of the Holy Land. We may approach such a survey with feelings somewhat akin to those with which a devout mind addresses itself to the study of the Word of God; for here is proof upon proof that he has not altered the word that has gone out of his mouth regarding the land, any more than regarding the people.





I.

THE FOUNTAIN-HEADS OF THE JORDAN.

THIS remarkable stream is supposed to derive its name from a Hebrew word which means "to descend;" and "The Descender" is therefore one of its titles, though every river might have the same name applied to it. Its course, including its windings, which have caused it to be described as "the crookedest river that is," may be about two hundred miles, from its fountains on the slopes of Hermon to the Dead Sea, where it is lost in that bituminous abyss. The country through which it flows is remarkable rather for its tameness than for such singular beauties as those which fringe the favourite rivers of Naaman the Syrian. But in the absence of some natural features which are commonly admired, historical associations cluster in such crowds around the River of "the Great Plain," that it stands out in contrast with all the streams famed either in the past or the present.

But as the course of the river is to be here briefly described, it may be well to commence with the inquiry, Where does the Jordan take its rise? It might be supposed that it would not be very difficult to decide that point regarding a stream so famous, and for long the most renowned in the world; and yet, like

Mountains of Moab.



PLAIN OF THE JORDAN FROM THE MOUNTAINS ABOVE JERICHO.

many other inquiries of a similar kind, it is darkened by controversy to an extent that is perplexing. At least six places are mentioned as deserving the honour of originating the Jordan, and it would not be difficult to add one more to the number. But, without entering into the depths of the controversy at all, the topography of the river-fountain must settle the question,—the highest stream that flows perennially in direct connection with the Jordan, and not merely a summer brook, suddenly flooded, as suddenly to run dry, must be acknowledged as the real well-head.

Some, then, have traced the rise of the Jordan only to Lake Huleh; and others reckon a little lake or quiet tarn nearer the mountains, the real spring. The name of that tarn is Phiala, “a vial or cup,” from its shape; and Josephus records that Philip the tetrarch cast some chaff into that lake, which disappeared there, but reappeared further down the stream. Upon that experiment, as reported, the claims of Phiala are supposed to be established; it was of old, at least, deemed the source of the Jordan.

But another competitor for that honour is found at Tell el Kady, the site of the ancient Dan; and the copiousness of the fountain there long gave it the reputation of being the real spring-head. In truth, however, we must dismiss all these, and penetrate further up among the mountains before we discover the source of the stream which the Arabs dignify as Esh Sherieh el Kebir—“the great watering-place.” It is well known that the slopes of Mount Hermon from east to west send forth innumerable streams, from fountains and

other sources, all of which find their way to the Valley of the Jordan. Whether the *remotest* fountain is found on the north-west, near Hasbeyiah, or on the north-east, near the village of Shibah, is now keenly contested; but the opposing views of travellers may perhaps be reconciled by a reference to the different seasons of the year at which they explored the region. If it was at the period of the melting of the snows, or after the heavy rains, one source might be the favourite; if at times of drought and sterility, another might be selected. But, waving all controversy, we regard the source at Hasbeyiah as that which is at once the most remote, the most copious, and perennial; though there are several summer brooks which help at times to augment the current. Hasbeyiah is a village at the base of Mount Hermon, containing, as some report, about six thousand inhabitants; and it is described as a pleasing though rugged scene, where the olive abounds, and where fountains gush forth in all directions. This birth-place of the river signalized by many a miracle on its borders, and selected by the Saviour as his baptismal font, has a grandeur becoming the magnitude of the stream. The mountains of Lebanon screen it to the north; Hermon seems its immediate guardian; away to the south, or south-east, are the hills of Gilead and Bashan. Nearer at hand are the hills of Galilee; and then come those of Samaria, and other land-marks, which are rendered attractive by the references which are made to them in Scripture. It is, then, amid such surroundings that the infant Jordan gushes into daylight. Tributary after tributary hastens from some of

these slopes to originate or augment the stream. Ravines filled with snow at one season, and with heavy rains at another, all tend to feed the fountain; and that fountain, we have seen, is found near Hasbeyiah. There is a bold perpendicular rock, from the base of which the waters gush forth in such abundance as to form, from the first, a copious stream; and that is now regarded by most as the real fountain-head. From that spot the river—which is about fifty feet broad from the first—speedily acquires such magnitude that it is soon spanned by a bridge of somewhat solid construction; though, a little further up, part of the current is diverted for the purpose of driving a mill. In the basin at the base of the perpendicular rock, the waters are deep and dark-coloured, yet clear and transparent. Still higher up, a winter torrent pours down a copious supply of water at certain seasons of the year; but as it becomes entirely dry in summer, we may fairly regard the other as the most northern source of the Jordan; it is unquestionably the most remarkable and at the same time the most remote among the mountain slopes. “The great fountain of Fuarr, below Hasbeyiah,” writes one whom we shall often have occasion to quote,* “is the most distant *permanent* source” of the Jordan.

The name of the river here is the Hasbany, or, as others pronounce it, the Hasbain; and at some points the scene is one of much beauty. About the Jisr el Ghujar, the rocks, the river, and the bridge, present a pleasing combination; and at certain seasons of the

* Dr. Thomson—“The Land and the Book,” chap. xv.

year, when the oleanders which fringe the river are in full bloom, the whole seems a scene of rosy richness such as might scarcely be expected in such a region. Slender sycamores also line the river, and for some miles it thus wanders on its way,—no unmeet commencement for a stream which increases the celebrity of a country rendered otherwise famous by a thousand causes.

While referring to the sources of the Jordan, it may be well to mention some of the other streams by which it is thus early fed. Before reaching Lake Huleh,—to be afterwards described,—the Hasbany, or Jordan, has received one stream from Shibah, another from Sureid, and the Luisany at El Ghujar. Further down it is joined by the Leddan, the Baniasy, and streams from the Plain of Ijon ; but the course of the Hasbany is longer than any of the rest, some say by forty miles, though the Leddan is the largest, and the Baniasy the most beautiful. These sources all combined, with the produce of the numerous fountains which occur in the neighbourhood, soon render the Jordan more ample than many larger rivers are, so near their source. One illustrious traveller mused and moralized as he bestrode the Nile where it begins to flow. Another exulted as he stepped across the newly formed Euphrates. Many a traveller has turned aside to visit the tiny fountain of the Danube. What pedestrian in Switzerland has not exulted to bound across the Rhine rill, far up in the Rheinwald? And may we not at least equally rejoice by the source of the Jordan,—the witness of events the most appalling as well as the



THE JORDAN AT HASBEYIAH.



THE JORDAN AT PANEAS.

most merciful, and whose banks to the ear of faith are vocal with a thousand lessons?

We have spoken of the streams which join the Jordan from the Valley of Ijon in this district, and some of the beauties ascribed to the spot may detain us for a little. The vale is very fertile, while the stream which waters it descends by a succession of cascades, and is joined at Abel by the Ruahiny. The cliffs there are covered with ruins so ancient as to be nameless; but one of the charms of the place should not be passed over in silence. Some are convinced that a beautiful flower, called the Huleh lily, which abounds in the Valley of Ijon, is the very flower to which the Great Teacher referred when he said, "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Luke xii. 27.) If, as some suppose, the reference in Solomon's Song, to the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, points to the same beautiful flower, we have both that prince and the "greater than Solomon" fixing our thoughts upon a flower which in beauty transcends all that monarchs can wear, or the pride of man invent.

At some places along the margin of the river, or in its bed, the evidences of the volcanic nature of the region are numerous. Boulders of black lava occasionally form the only pathway; and the river has here worn a sinuous bed for its current, two hundred feet deep, through the lava rock. So sheer is the descent, that the width from brink to brink of the bank is about equal to the depth. The river is still fringed

with oleanders, willows, and sycamores ; it is alive with fish, and guides the traveller on his way always charmed and sometimes astonished at what he sees.

At the distance of about three miles from Hasbeyiah there are some wells of bitumen, which may deserve a notice as natural curiosities. It is well known that that production is often found floating in the Dead Sea, or cast out in large masses on its shore. The Arabs believe that it is produced at the bottom, and detached and thrown up by some submarine influence. Now as that substance exists at the terminus of the Jordan, so it is found here at the fountain-head of the stream. A shaft one hundred and sixteen feet deep is required at some places to reach the bitumen ; and it is found sometimes exuding from the rocks which the shaft penetrates, or formed into solid strata, compared to black amber. It is supposed that the bitumen is constantly growing. In a limited space near Hasbeyiah it has been dug out for many ages, and yet it shows no symptom of decrease. It is inferred, therefore, that there must be some prodigious stores of bitumen in the interior of the adjacent mountains ; and that, like percolating water, it exudes through the veins into the wells where it has been dug for so long a period. The presence of such a substance explains some of the scriptural references to slime-pits and pitch. (Gen. xi. 3, xiv. 10 ; Ex. ii. 3.)

At Hasbeyiah, and other places near the fountains of the Jordan, the olive tree yields its fertility, to enrich, or at least sustain the people. The olive groves in the

land are the resorts of flocks of pigeons, which build and breed in the trees, and their neighbourhood everywhere rings with their cooing. Moreover, the olive tree, with all the lithe gracefulness of its branches, seems to realize the assurance of the Lawgiver regarding "oil out of the flinty rock:" for, in order to gather fatness for its berries, it seems to insert its roots into the very heart of the rocks on which it grows;—and the result is both fertility and beauty; a fertility which yields abundance and propagates joy; a beauty which makes an olive tree, and much more an olive grove, an ornament for the wild terraces and slopes which abound near the sources of the Jordan. Dr. Thomson says he was told that if the overlying mould happens to be so deep that its roots cannot reach the rock beneath, the olive tree languishes, and its berries become small and sapless.

The snows of Lebanon are proverbial; and their effect upon the Jordan entitles them to our notice. Snow generally falls on Mount Hermon in November, but at times it is even later. It disappears in April, except where it is drifted, as in deep ravines, though the summits are sometimes covered with fresh snow in May; and, indeed, the fitful changes of the weather are perplexing alike to the farmer and the traveller, especially in the uplands. When to this we add the devastations produced by land-slips from the sides of the mountains there, it becomes plain that Palestine has within its borders very many of the ills that flesh is heir to. About a century ago, for example, a land-slip occurred on one of the declines of Lebanon which

had a village perched upon it, and which plunged full fifteen hundred feet down into the valley, carrying death to nearly all that was living, and desolation to all besides. It stopped the flow of the river for seven days; and the only man who escaped from the catastrophe was made a maniac for life by the shock. Sometimes the sublimity of these dark depths is enhanced by the presence of eagles soaring far overhead. They are said to exist there in thousands; and their manœuvres, as they approach their eyries, are described as attractive. They tell why the eagle, the noblest of birds, is so often and so sublimely introduced in the noblest of books: "Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she." (Job xxxix. 27-30.)

While wandering amid scenes so majestic, and finding so much that is scriptural there, we are naturally led to inquire, what is the religion which prevails, say at Hasbeyiah. Remote and inaccessible among the spurs of Lebanon as it seems to be, we learn that there are about four thousand there who bear the Christian name. The demand for Protestant books is said to be very general; and as early as the year 1843 some of its people were prepared to adopt the religion of the Bible as opposed to that of the priest. The labours and the lessons of American missionaries have more recently deepened and extended these tendencies, and

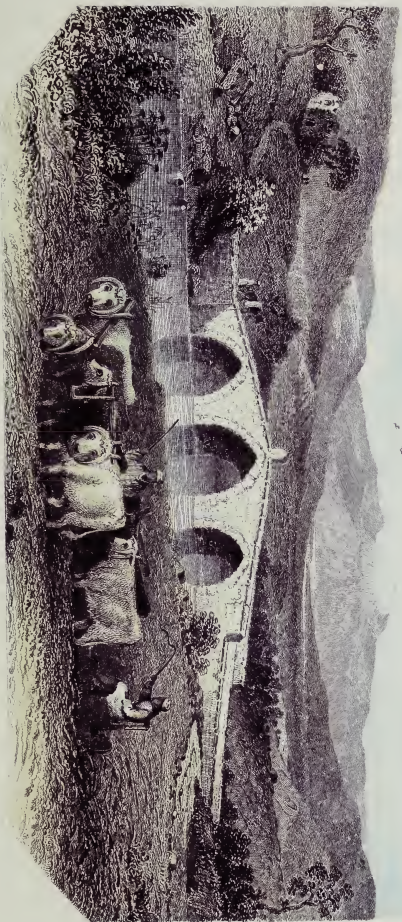
the effects have proved to be of a very decided kind. They are such as may well encourage those who seek to dispel darkness by introducing the light of life ; and it is obvious that the terraces where the olive, the fig, and the mulberry luxuriantly flourish near Hasbeyiah, are only types of the spiritual fruits which would follow spiritual culture.

But trials, or rather persecutions, have been allowed to test the infant Church there. About one hundred and fifty of the people, some years ago, actually abandoned the superstitions which overlay the truth, and declared that they would “suffer themselves to be chopped like tobacco” rather than draw back,—and they were soon put to the proof. Their patriarch, who resides at Damascus, was incensed, and pained as night birds are, by the intrusion of light into the domain of darkness. The Turkish authorities took the alarm, as if one of the radical laws of the Koran had been trampled on by those converts. Persecution, compulsion, and restraint, the despot’s ever ready arguments, were speedily employed ; and the united influence of Britain, of Prussia, and of France, was needed to secure a measure of toleration for the Protestants of Hasbeyiah,—the men who sought their creed from the word of God, not from the corruptions of a fellow-creature. But neither the excommunication which followed nor the obloquy which was heaped upon them could drive *all* the Hasbeyian Christians to apostatize ; and their case encourages the hope that those morally desert places will blossom yet. “What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord ;

and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" And the fire is penetrating,—the hammer is breaking; for in the dominions of the sultan, and everywhere besides, the truth of God is prevailing. The sword of Mohammed is sheathed, not from want of will, but from want of power, to persecute as of old. The three thousand year old superstitions of India are slowly crumbling away; and all that seemed most enduring of earthly things is gradually becoming a plain before that word of the Lord which endureth for ever.*

In proceeding from Hasbeyiah to Banias, among the spurs of Mount Lebanon, we find the site of some ruined temples, which add to the interest, or the mystery of the district. Upon Lebanon and its offshoots there have been counted upwards of twenty such ruins, nearly all of them occupying spots of extreme beauty, and pointing back to times of which no record remains—not even a trustworthy tradition. The ruins to which reference is at present made are at Kulat Bustra, on the brow of a precipitous shoulder of the mountain. The summit of that height is crowded with the ruins.

* Since the above sentences were written, new desolations have swept away the Church at Hasbeyiah and elsewhere throughout Syria. Many hundreds have been mercilessly butchered by the Druses, who inhabit Mount Lebanon, and abound in other places; and even the atrocities of Cawnpore have been exceeded in those wild regions by still wilder men. It is not easy to say exactly how far Turkish fanaticism has co-operated with Druse ferocity in such bloody scenes; but while we mourn over such events, we may be comforted by the conviction that God over all will make this and all the wrath of man to praise him. These wild and lawless holders of a bloody creed are fast placing themselves beyond the pale of toleration; and though conscience never can be coerced, crime must be repressed.



Four separate temples have been traced, and more, perhaps, once existed. The architecture is devoid of ornament, and seems to claim a dateless antiquity, as the stones are of a kind on which age appears to make no impression. The temples were from thirty to fifty feet in width, and of proportional length—but who was the god? who were the worshippers? No Christian symbol can be recognised there; the ruins do not indicate a Druse origin; and the alternative seems to be, that they formed one of those high places sacred to Baal and denounced with such oft-recurring energy by prophet after prophet. Nowhere can man behold more magnificent displays of the majesty and the power of the Eternal than around the fountains of the Jordan; yet nowhere has He been more signally dishonoured, or more systematically dethroned, to make room for some pagan abomination,—a Baal, an Ashtoreth, or a Dagon.





II.

BANIAS—LAKE PHIALA—TELL EL KADY.

1. BANIAS.

THIS is still claimed by some as the real fountain of the Jordan. In the neighbourhood of Banias there are scenes of surpassing beauty; and its associations, both with what is sacred and what is secular, render it one of the most interesting sites in Palestine, on whose northern frontier it stands. The noble oak glades, forming the most park-like scenes in Syria, are gradually disappearing before the peasant's axe; and the region which was lately one majestic park will soon be stripped bare of its beauties. But Banias can never be deprived of its historical associations, and these induce us to linger fondly about the place. Scattered all around are the ruins of the ancient town;—fragments of its decorations are frequent, and the modern village seems crouching among the ruins, overgrown with such creepers and underwood as can be found only in the lands of the sun. The scene, indeed, is one of the grandest on which the eye of man can repose. The oak glades, and the abounding brooks; the lofty mountains,—for example, Hermon, ten thousand feet high; the snow in the ravines; the rich verdure in the valleys; the wheeling eagle; and the massive ruin, appearing to fatigue even

time in its attempts at demolition;—all attract and arrest. Even prose rises into poetry when men describe the region. The fifty poor huts which form the modern village scarcely detract from the beauty: by contrast they perhaps enhance it.

But let us approach the fountain, and come to details. The waters gush forth from a cave at the base of a high rock, where a temple once stood dedicated to Pan, which gave its name to the place, or Paneas; changed by the Arabs into Banias. In the front of the rock are seen some niches for statues, indicating the purposes for which the fountain was at one time employed; and some Greek inscriptions can with difficulty be deciphered. But time, and earthquakes, to which the region is subject, have changed the aspect of the place, and it is not easy to trace the ancient inscriptions with exactness. The fountain in the grotto, which Josephus has described, is now in a great measure choked up with ruins and rubbish, through which the waters have to force their way. There, one has said, “the fountain pours its hundred streams;” and they seem to leap along their way, spreading greenness and fertility around, hastening to swell the Jordan, which, as we have seen, some believe to have its true rise here. These waters run in all directions through the village, so copious are they: there is no regular channel formed as yet, but were the separate rills gathered into one, the size of the Jordan here would be wonderful. All, however, is now a waste of ruins. Idolatry once reigned there. Art, in the hand of despotism, once lavished its skill in constructing aqueducts, bridges, and other useful build-

ings. But Desolation now presides over the whole; though some plantations of mulberry trees, the oaks which are so abundant, and the copious verdure arising from the numerous streams, throw a garb of no little beauty over these sad remains of the past.

The history of this remote town, the source of at least a branch of the Jordan, deserves a glance. It is recorded that, in ancient times, a victim was cast into the fountain at an annual festival; and that, "by the power of the demon," he forthwith disappeared. If it was, as Josephus writes, "a cavern abrupt, and prodigiously deep," the fact might be explained without any demon's power; but the whole is most probably a myth, and one of the lying wonders which have in all ages haunted the land of Him who is the Truth. And whatever may be the explanation of such rites, it is known that Herod was at pains to decorate Banias. He constructed a temple there, which he dedicated to Cæsar; for the honours or the kingdom bestowed upon Herod by his patron drew forth offerings in return, and the temple of white marble erected near the fountain told the gratitude of the Hebrew ruler to his Roman benefactor. The historian of these incidents is careful to dwell upon the loftiness of the mountain which towers above the fountain, as well as the depth of its waters, and the horrible precipice formed by the cave; but the embellishments of fable are largely added to the realities of fact.

During the Roman reigns which followed Cæsar's usurpation and death, further embellishments were added to Banias. Philip the tetrarch gave it the name

of Cæsarea in honour of Tiberius, and Philippi to do honour to himself, as well as to distinguish it from Cæsarea Palestina on the sea-coast. But once more there was a change among the magnates, and Herod Agrippa called the place Neroneas in compliment to Nero his patron. Titus was feasted by Agrippa for twenty days after his return from the siege and sacking of Jerusalem, when many of the captives perished at Banias in gladiatorial shows.

As to the extent of ancient Banias it is difficult to be precise. Starting from the fountain, following the brook which flows from it, and wandering through the oak groves westward, one reaches the castle, at the north-west corner of the city; then passing some mills on the brook, the traveller makes his way to the south-west corner; and guided thence by a wall, he crosses a deep ravine by a bridge, till he reaches the south-east corner; from which the line of a ditch guides him back to the point of starting. These ravines and ditches could all have been filled with water from the fountain; so that though small, Banias was no despicable opponent, when in the hands of a hostile power. But it is the castle that now gives the chief attraction to the place,—next, at least, to the fountain. It stands on a rock somewhat to the east of the modern village, about one thousand feet above it, and from two thousand to three thousand above the level of the sea. The panoramic view from the ruin is majestic. Deep ravines and wooded slopes; oak groves and rushing brooks; and Jebel es Sheikh, the “prince of mountains,” for a back ground, with crowds of sacred and historical associations,—all render the

place one of those which seen once are remembered for ever. Doubts and debates leave the age of the ruin unsettled, but there can be little doubt that the handiwork of the Romans can there be traced, though other styles are also visible. The Cyclopean stones; the doors which were not shut, but drawn up and down in a groove; the vaults, the tanks, and massive walls,—all indicate the prodigious strength of the fortress. Saracens, Templars, and other Crusaders, and the ruling powers of successive generations for two thousand years, have all left their mark upon the Castle of Banias; but Time, the subduer, has swept them all away, while it is gradually wasting the castle itself. It is said to have been finally abandoned in the seventeenth century; but its magnitude, strength, and position, utterly impregnable before the invention of artillery, must have rendered it an object of desire to many an assailant during the ages when war was man's chief business, and bloodshed his pathway to aggrandizement. Some idea of the extent to which such things were carried in this region may be derived from the fact that the Castle of Hunin, in Naphtali, was surrounded by a fosse forty feet wide and twenty deep, all cut in the solid rock, enclosing a portion of the building about three hundred feet square.

Whether Banias be the site of Baal-hermon, as is conjectured with some show of reason by Dr. Thomson, or some other ancient place whose memory has perished, its castle and wide-spread ruins, its verdant groves and plenteous streams, its rocks and mountains and plains, all combine to make up a scene such as will

scarcely be found repeated even in this land of wonders. Its beauty or its grandeur, however, is no antidote to the miseries which infest man; and the one plague of scorpions, which at some seasons of the year compel the inhabitants to abandon their homes and live in booths to escape from these always noxious, sometimes deadly reptiles, is described as the pest of Banias.

This region, however, has far higher attractions for the Christian than any that Saracen or Crusader, Turk or Templar, can impart: like most others in the land, it has been consecrated by the presence of the Saviour. He has most probably drunk at the fountain; he has certainly traversed these scenes. Waving all reference to mere traditions—such as that which alleges that the woman cured of an issue of blood by the Redeemer, was a native of Banias—we take up the inspired record and find that, when Jesus went to visit the “the towns of Cæsarea Philippi,” he afforded to Peter the opportunity of confessing his faith, or announcing his creed regarding the person of his Lord; when he said, “Thou art the Christ” (Mark viii. 27-29). It was near these fountains of the Jordan that the Teacher sent from God opened up the great doctrine of the atonement, so offensive to some of his followers; and, for other reasons, so offensive to many still. It was there that the apostle took the Redeemer apart and began to rebuke him for saying that he must suffer (ver. 31, 32); and it was there that that loving Lord addressed that impetuous disciple in words which sound as if they were harsh, but which are really as tender as they are profound,—“Get thee behind me, Satan” (ver. 33). It was there, moreover, that

the good Lord announced his exclusive terms of discipleship, namely, taking up the cross and following him, though life should be lost in doing so (ver. 34, 35). It was there, finally, that the only wise God, our Saviour, put the solemn questions, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (ver. 36, 37.) These and similar doings invest this region with a peculiar charm for meditative minds. Amid the oak and mulberry groves of Cæsarea Philippi, our communion with the Redeemer may be made closer and more constraining, by the remembrance of what he taught there. It is not the grandeur of Hermon, nor the greenness of Banias; it is not its hundred brooks, nor its hoary grotto, nor its crowding traditions, that make the place a shrine, a vast magnificent temple for the Christian: it is the fact that Jesus his Lord has been there. When a vessel is ploughing her way through the sea, phosphorescent light flashes off from her prow, and sparkles in her wake; and the footprints of the Saviour in his own land, are ever, in like manner, radiant with light. If it were pleasant, then, to read Virgil in the cave at Cumæ, or Horace at the Sabine farm, how much more the New Testament at Cæsarea Philippi! Banias has been called "almost a Syrian Tivoli;" but though it were altogether one, what of that compared with the glory of the Redeemer's presence?

We take the New Testament, then, in our hand. We are traversing the region to which the Saviour resorted, and are for the time seated under the shadow of groves lineally descended from those which afforded

him a canopy. We gaze upon the same skies, and may witness the rising and setting of the same stars. But in the book which we hold in our hand we find truths which are destined to outlast these stars, and see the heavens pass away like a scroll. What, then, are some of these truths? We have just quoted one. Under the shadow of Jebel es Sheikh, and amid the very scenes on which we are now gazing, He who spake as man never did, proclaimed: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." Self-denial and the cross,—these two unwelcome truths form, in one point of view, the primary elements in the Christian character, Christ himself being judge. As Jebel es Sheikh reigns over the scene amid which the words were spoken, these maxims should dominate over the Christian's career.

True, we are prone to read them without allowing free scope to them in ruling the life. We are ready to seek a better Christianity, or to fabricate an easier yoke than the Saviour's: but that is never done except at the price of dishonour to his truth; and the true heroes of the Church have ever been those who sat down at Christ's feet as he taught at Banias; who entered into the depths of his sayings; who, without dismay, took up the cross, and found, according to his words, that he made the yoke easy, and the burden light.

Paul had learned that lesson; and what has he thought of his cross for eighteen centuries and more? The remembrance of it has only added rapture to the beatitudes of heaven.

And Luther had also learned that lesson. He also

was taught to practise what Jesus inculcated among "the towns of Cæsarea Philippi;" and what has he thought of his trials, and buffetings, and sorrows, for the three centuries during which he has lived beyond the grave? They make his crown more bright, and his hosanna more cordial ;—and so for ever and ever with the multitude whom no man can number who practised what Jesus taught.

But still another truth is pressed upon our notice beside these copious streams flowing from that "glorious fountain." Augustus, Tiberius, Nero, Philip the tetrarch, and one of the Agrippas, were all honoured here, and some of them had temples dedicated to them, as if they had been gods. Under the shelter, perhaps, of what has been called the strongest fortress in the land, colossal structures were reared to their honour, and much that was meant to bring glory to the creature was there. But where are those creatures, and where that glory now? On the other hand, the Son of God appeared in his lowliness there. His presence passed like a gleam of sunshine over the scene—it passed and was forgotten. But where is he now? On the throne of glory for ever; so that these scenes of mingled grandeur and beauty, like ten thousand others, tell us of the blessedness of living for eternity and God—they assure us once more that the only enduring portion for man is that favour of God which is life.

There is one other consideration still suggested by this neighbourhood. It was long thought that Mount Tabor was the scene of the Redeemer's transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 1-12); and as tradition in a con-

tinuous stream flowed in that direction, it flowed without much challenge. In recent times, however, a new competitor for that honour has been brought forward, namely, Mount Hermon ; and if its claim were admitted, the whole region would have one attraction more. But we know not that the ever busy One lingered so long as six days at Banias (see Matt. xvii. 1) ; so that the question must remain for ever unsettled. And it is well. Even in a state of uncertainty, we are prone to cling to such places, as if they had some virtue in them,—how much more had the spot been fixed, and all the accompaniments of the scene been vividly depicted ! How much better to be transformed into Christ's image, from glory to glory, than to determine the precise spot of his transfiguration ! If that wondrous change—designed, most probably, to indicate, as far as man can know, what the “spiritual body” is—took place on one of the summits of Mount Hermon, that would signalize it more and more ; and we would willingly believe that that is the scene : but what the Truth has not told, we need not attempt to conjecture.

2. PHIALA.

About two hours eastward from Banias is a singular sheet of water, already referred to, and described by Josephus under the name of Phiala, “the bowl or cup,” but now called Birket Ram, “the great pool.” As the region is of volcanic origin, the Cup is deemed the crater of an extinct volcano, and is about three miles in

circuit.* All around it lies a region notable for its fertility, where olive groves and abundant harvests might spread a general felicity, if merely material things could promote that result. A noisy brook, called the Saary, traverses the district;—not so wild, however, in its brawling course, as the lawless Arabs who haunt the region. The lake is described by Dr. Thomson as round like a bowl, motionless as a molten mirror, but alive with frogs, leeches, ducks, and hawks. Part of the surface is covered with weeds; and at some distance from the Cup, a white-domed mazar, or shrine of a Mohammedan saint, is seen; while the hovering of the birds, the croaking of the frogs, combined with the fear of an attack from some of the men whose hand is against all that come in their way, render the spot at once peculiar and exciting. *Somewhere*, there must be copious fountains to feed the little lake; for though it has neither visible feeder nor visible outlet, in spite of the high evaporating power of the sun in such a place, the Cup is always full to the brim. The story given by Josephus, that this pool and Banias are connected by a subterranean passage, for chaff thrown in here reappeared there, is disproved by the fact that the geological structure makes such a thing impossible. Were there a free communication, moreover, the outflow at Banias would drain this pool in a day.

* It is right, however, to say, that Mr. E. S. Ffoulkes, after personal inspection of the region, is of opinion that the Phiala of Josephus has not yet been identified: he argues for another pool several hours higher up on the slopes of Mount Hermon.

Occasion may here be taken to notice that the old Hebrew idea of a lake or a sea was so different from ours, that it has given rise to some difficulty in understanding the scriptural topography. In the district occupied by the Gibeonites, for example, there was a little pond or lake, and it continues to this day. Now, in assigning boundaries to the tribes in the time of Joshua, one of the borders of Benjamin is described as "compassing the corner of the sea." A glance at a map of Palestine, however, will show that it were difficult to conjecture how any portion of the inheritance of Benjamin could reach the Mediterranean, as Gibeon and its vicinity lie in the very centre of the Holy Land, between the Jordan and the Great Sea. But let it be borne in mind that the Hebrews called a lake a sea,—that is, the word for both was in some cases the same,—and the whole difficulty vanishes. The pool or little lake* is the sea referred to in the Book of Joshua; just as Phiala might have been called a sea: and so we learn at once to correct an error in the topography of the land, and to understand what the Hebrews meant by that expression.

3. TELL EL KADY.

We now rejoin the stream that flows from Banias and proceed to trace it downward, under the name of the Baniasy. The whole region round the southern base of Hermon is one of singular and most diversified

* Milton calls even the Dead Sea, seventy miles long though it be, "The Asphaltic Pool."

beauty. Whether in storm or in sunshine, it seems to be a section of this earth which may be likened to the poetry of creation ; and his soul is dead indeed who does not see in all that is here spread around him one proof more of the exuberant goodness of his God. Pity that we should be able to wander amid such scenes and not think of God at all. But as we proceed southward, one of the chief objects which arrest us is a circular, half-hollow mound, marking the site of ancient Dan, "the judge;" and by its modern name, Tell el Kady, "the hill of the judge," still preserving in translation the original title. This, also, it is well known, is reputed one of the fountains of the Jordan ; and the outflow is, perhaps, the most copious in Syria,—some say, even in the world. But there are more fountains than one, and the volume of water which they contribute to the Jordan is very abundant. The stream gushes up among some briars and bushes, in the centre of what seems an extinct volcano. At the north-west corner of the mound, part of the water glides off into "a wide crystal pool," shaded by wild fig trees ; and another portion, from another spring, escapes in a slightly different direction, to drive some mills below, as the Hasbany branch is also employed to do.

This fountain is reputed that of Daphne, and, as we have seen, the Tell marks the site of ancient Dan ; but the place deserves a further notice, were it only for the sake of its fountains. It is the same as Lasha, mentioned in Scripture as existing prior to the days of Abraham. (Gen. x. 19.) At an early period of the Hebrew settlement in Canaan, it was seized by the tribe of

Dan, who gave to it the name of their father ; and that tribe thus acquired possessions at the two opposite extremities of the land, namely, their rightful lot in the south, and Lasha here in the north, under the shadow of Hermon, at the fountains of the Jordan. The ruins of the ancient city still lie around : huge shapeless blocks of lava, as fresh, we are told, as they were three thousand years ago, are there ; so that we have more monuments of this Dan than of some far more important cities. Ben-hadad smote it, we know, a thousand years before Christ came (1 Kings xv. 20) ; and it appears from that period to have sunk into comparative decay.

It *was* famous, however, in at least one respect, namely, for its idolatry ; and the Hebrews had not long dwelt there when that sin appeared among them. The proximity of the pagan Sidonians, to whom Laish or Lasha had belonged, perhaps proved a snare. And as idolatry early began, it was long continued ; for we know, both from history and the denunciations of the prophets, that Jeroboam set up his golden calves for worship, and Laish was one of the selected places. "Behold thy gods, O Israel !" then became the senseless cry, when "Jeroboam set the one calf in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan." It is thus that wherever we go, into the crowded city or the desert place, man carries his corruption with him, and spreads it like a defiling flood. From Dan to Beer-sheba in the very Land of Promise, from kingdom to kingdom, from city to city, from home to home, from heart to heart, the same law operates, until the new law of love be obeyed ; that is, until almighty grace takes the control of the

mind, to make all things new, according to the promise.

In the spring at Tell el Kady, travellers inform us, buffaloes may often be seen immersed, with only the muzzle above the surface of the water. There they stand to escape from the fervour of the sun, and other annoyances, realizing the poetry of Job, and translating a word-picture into a common fact. They seek the shade of the willows and the reeds which abound at some places along the course of the river, and wallow in the marshes; they are, in truth, undisputed lords of the mud and the mire. Dr. Thomson, moreover, thinks that buffaloes represent the behemoth of Job (chap. xl. 15, 21, 23); and argues that that gives verisimilitude to the supposition that the patriarch's land, "the land of Uz," was in this vicinity. There is, indeed, a region far to the east of Tell el Kady, which claims to be Job's land, and we need not agitate the question here. But one is not unwilling to believe that this is the scenery amid which some of those events took place which are described in what is, perhaps, the oldest book in the world.—Dr. Wilson tells us that he found a considerable number of fresh-water tortoises disporting in these remarkable springs.

But we descend the river again, and leave the pleasant shadow of the trees which surround the Tell. As we proceed, stream after stream falls into the Jordan. That from Shibah, and another from the fountain of Sureid, the Luisany, the Leddan, and the Baniasy, all gradually, or in succession, mingle their waters, and pass on to form the Lake Huleh. Indeed fountain after

fountain, from that at Hasbeyiah, about eighteen miles to the north, to those just named, pours down its copious supply, and if ever there was a land of brooks of water, this is it. The distance from Tell el Kady to the chief junction may be about five miles, where the gathering waters, after passing by the ruins of Daphneh and under some majestic oaks, become one river, instead of three, the Hasbany, the Baniasy, and the Leddan. After that the united stream becomes the Jordan, glides slowly through several miles of marsh, and then becomes the Lake Merom, which is next to be described.





III.

LAKE HULEH, OR THE WATERS OF MEROM.

THIS is the Merom, or “the high lake,” of Joshua, and the Samechonitis of the Greeks. The plain and the marsh above it are estimated by Dr. Thomson at about ten square miles in extent; and the eastern side, though marshy, is fit for cultivation. He calls it the granary of the surrounding country, and the boast of the Arabs, whose name for the lake is Bahr-Hit, “the sea of wheat.” The climate is warm, the soil is as fat as that of Egypt, and the whole is irrigated by innumerable canals, from the Hasbany, the Leddan, and the Baniasy. Of this fertile region the produce is as varied as it is rich. Indian corn, rice, sesamum, wheat and barley, are all raised in the Huleh: it is to this section of Syria what Egypt or Sicily was to the Romans. Herds of buffaloes are rife; large quantities of butter are made; honey is produced in abundance; and Dr. Thomson says that the Huleh is in truth “a perpetual pasture-field for cattle, and a flowery paradise for bees,”—“the whole region rang as if a thousand hives were *swarming* at once.” It is a scene, in short, which answers exactly to the inspired descriptions of the land, and might well account for the cupidity of

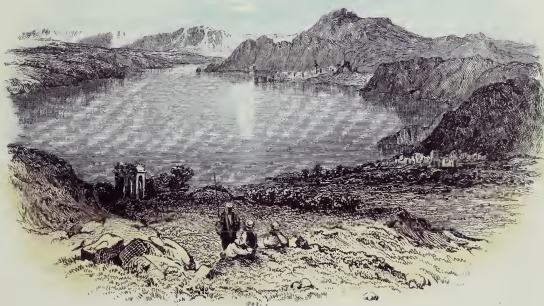
Mount Hermon



UPPER PLAIN OF THE JORDAN & LAKE MEROM.

Tiberias

Magdala



SEA OF GALILEE FROM SUPPOSED RUINS OF CAPERNAUM.

the Danite spies, who reported that there was "no want there of anything that is in the earth."

This fertile though marshy plain is obviously the result of the muddy deposit from some of the upper fountains, like the Hasbany, the Saary, the Derdarah, and others. In truth, the conjecture is plausible that in course of time Lake Merom will be silted up. The tangled jungle which skirts it at some places, and which even a wild boar could scarcely penetrate, helps forward that process. It is the home for countless flocks of crows; the marshes are the retreat of innumerable ducks, of herds of buffaloes, and, indeed, of animal life in general, at once in minute and in majestic forms. On some spots near the margin sparrows in myriads build their nests; everything, in short, seems joyous and developed to the full in the Huleh. It is mainly on the east side that the lake can be easily approached, and a lonely water-sheet it is. No boat plies there. The tall tufted babeer cane stands like a crowd of sentinels eight or ten feet high, near the place where the Jordan leaves the lake. That sheet of water, so placid and so still, helps on the fertility of one of the most fertile plains in Palestine; but once freed from the lake and the skirting jungle, and after a gentle glide of half a mile or so, these waters, as if rejoicing to be free, hasten down to Jisr-Benat-Yacobe, and thence rush over dark basaltic rocks to the Lake of Tiberias, a distance of several miles. The extent of this lake is very variously estimated—perhaps owing to the season of the year at which it is visited—at some periods it is about seven miles in circumference; and

when we add the fact that the olive, the terebinth, the oak, the jessamine, and many flowering shrubs, contribute to the attractions of the spot, enough has perhaps been said to show that more than one portion of the upper Jordan vies with the lower in such beauty and such attractions as belong to the river.

In the vicinity, or at no great distance, are various ruins which might attract our notice, were it our object to describe the district and not the stream. Tombs covered by domes, the ruins of temples, and of towns, lie within a short distance. Among these remains of the past we may advert to what is called the Tomb of the Prophet Joshua,—a place of great resort to the people of the surrounding district. It stands in a region where fountains and streams abound. From a pool in one of them, about four hundred feet in circumference, copious supplies of fish are taken ; but, owing to the incursions of the Arabs, there is not an inhabited house in all the plain. The hill-sides, or the munitions of rocks, alone afford safety in such a country.

The battle which connected the name of Joshua with that of Lake Merom was memorable, even in an age of conflicts. The Amorite, the Hittite, the Jebusite, the Hivite, were all assembled in the plain ; and their purpose was to resist or annihilate the Hebrew captain by one united effort. But their countless hordes were routed by him in an unexpected attack (Josh. xi.), and king Jabin and his allies fled like chaff before the wind. The ruins of at least one of the cities which Joshua then destroyed by fire are still visible ; so that

wandering in this country brings us as nearly as possible into personal contact with three thousand years ago. The ravages of those wars by which the nations of Canaan were destroyed, added to other incidents in the history of Israel, might tempt us to linger in this region longer than its modern importance deserves.

But whence the dreary depopulation which reigns here now? How comes it to pass that a Mohammedan wali disfigures the scene on which the blessing of God has so often been pronounced in common with the whole land of Israel? Whence these alien occupants of a country allotted to the Jews in many an inspired verse, whose glowing language competes in beauty with the ancient loveliness of Palestine? All must be traced to the fact that Israel would none of God's counsel, and would listen to none of his reproof. All day long, for century after century, he stretched out his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people. At last, and to crown the whole, he said, "Surely they will reverence my Son," and sent him forth to work his works of mercy. But when even "He came to his own, his own received him not;" nay, when he held out his hand to bless them, they seized it and nailed it to a tree. Hence the present misery of the monumental people; and hence the sterility of their lovely land, trodden down as it is by the Gentiles, and will be, till the time of restoration. Just as our world was transformed into a vast sepulchre by sin, much of Palestine began to be blighted as if by lightning, from the time that its people crucified the Lord of glory. And yet the Jews are "beloved for the fathers' sakes;" and the

world is mysteriously a tip-toe for the unrolling of the scroll which describes their future. The

“Tribes of the wandering foot and weary breast ”

will yet find rest under their own Messiah-king, when the margin of Merom will be vocal again with the shout of more than victory,—when men shall “sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise unto the end of the earth.”

But beautiful as the lake may be, though its margin be carpeted with flowers of every hue, its surface instinct with life, and all that can fascinate the lover of the wild be rife, all these things together are not a match for the corruptions that are in man : in spite of all that is beautiful to the eye, he clings to the polluting. Among the Bedawin Arabs, for example, and especially around this Huleh, there is a practice which renders this clear. When an Arab dies, his best ox or buffalo is slaughtered near the dead body, and then cooked for a sacrificial banquet, of which all who are at hand must partake. The entire tribe then proceed from the feast to the funeral ; and so binding is this ceremony in honour of the dead that it must be observed, though the whole property of the departed be consumed, and his widow and children left to starve. It is like the extreme unction of another superstition, and can on no account be passed over.

This, however, is far from being the only superstition rampant in this region. In some places every village contains the mazar or wali of some reputed saint, under an oak tree as of old, where these patron

deities are worshipped with an ardour worthy of a better cause. The "high places," in short, continue as great favourites as they were of old; and the superstition does not need to be revived,—it is as prevalent as ever. The dome which covers the worshipped dead may beautify the landscape, but it tells yet more plainly that man is man, be he Jew, Arab, Italian, or Briton. Superstition, and not the religion of God, is his creed.

We have not nearly exhausted the wonders which travellers note on the margin of Lake Huleh, and on the hills around it. Panthers and leopards, bears and wolves, jackals, hyenas, and foxes, wild boars and gazelles, with many other animals, are found there. The pelican makes the lake her home, and we have seen that myriads of water-fowl cover its surface. The region, indeed, seems a common meeting-place for most of the animals that are found within the boundaries of Palestine;—a sure proof of depopulation, and of the consequent desolation which reigns around. But we cannot dwell longer on details. In this northern section of the land we have already found much to illustrate the Bible, and to show that in every place, as in all times, the Supreme does as he has said.





IV.

FROM JISR-BENAT-YACOBÉ TO THE SEA OF GALILEE.

AFTER its escape from the jungle and the marsh of Merom, the Jordan glides peacefully down for a mile, or rather more, till it reaches Jisr-Benat-Yacobe—"the bridge of Jacob's daughters"—where the river is about eighty feet wide. That bridge, which has been pronounced Saracenic, is a substantial fabric, with three broad arches—Dr. Robinson says four; and as it lies in the line of the road to Damascus, from Akka and other places on the coast, a considerable traffic, for an Eastern country, passes over it. A guard is always stationed there; and the ruins of a large khan at one place, and of a castle at another, indicate that in former times the pass was deemed worth defending. It was at this passage over the Jordan that Baldwin III. of Jerusalem was surprised and defeated by Nureddin, in the year 1157. In 1178 Baldwin IV. founded a new fortress at the ford, on the west side of the river, and made it a place of great strength. The Templars were made its custodiers; but even their resolute daring could not long hold the place. In the year 1179 Saladin assaulted it; after some delay took it; put the garrison mostly to the

sword; and then razed the castle to the foundations. Its ruins are what travellers now see on the west bank of the Jordan, near the bridge.

The distance to the Sea of Galilee is estimated by some at twelve miles, by others at only six; and for the greater part of that distance the Jordan rushes with impetuous force down a succession of roaring rapids and dashing cataracts, in a "wild, stern gorge, fit haunt for robbers, from which it is hardly ever free." It enters the Sea of Galilee about two miles below the ruins of Julias, and at its embouchure it is about seventy feet wide. It is there a foaming, rapid torrent, fringed with oleanders; and two palm trees are mentioned as standing near the entrance into the lake, as if welcoming the river to the climate which they love.

But whence the name of "Jacob's daughters?" or is the spot connected with the patriarch at all? Tradition says, according to some, that it was here that Jacob recrossed the Jordan when returning to the Land of Promise after his long sojourn in a far country. Here, according to that story, the interview took place between him and his injured brother Esau; and here some of the earlier events recorded concerning that family which was the selected depository of God's truth, befell. Here, however, as in a hundred other cases, tradition and the Bible are at variance; and it will hereafter appear that it was much further down the river that the patriarch crossed it. We must, therefore, count it enough that Jordan is here before us, rushing on its impetuous way, over black and barren rocks. As we stand by the bridge we are reminded, by its Mo-

hammedan name, that the followers of the pretender profess to hold many things in common with those of Him who is the Truth. They pay profound respect to the patriarchs, and deem their dust a sacred deposit. Witness the tombs at Hebron, guarded as they are with lynx-eyed and superstitious care. Nay, even the Saviour himself they honour as a prophet, at the very time that they outrage his teaching, and try to falsify his predictions. Strange inconsistency this, but an inconsistency in which the Mohammedans, unhappily, do not stand alone.

Further: there are some places in Syria where almost every village has its thick oak growing near, sacred to some fancied divinity, as of old. Many of these trees are believed to be the abodes of certain spirits, fairies, elves, or the like, called Benat-Yacobe,—as their descendants are in some countries still named, by a fading superstition, “the good folk,”—and that is most probably the origin of the name of this bridge. Some legend, or some rite connected with these sprites, attaches to the place or neighbourhood; and hence, most probably, the designation.

Over the scene now before us, as over many others in Palestine, Mount Hermon stands conspicuous, the guardian of the place. Madame de Stael, with a true sentiment, said that it was one of the felicities of Rome, that while there we are always near the Tiber; and, in the same spirit, it is a chief pleasure of the upper Jordan that we are always in sight of Hermon. The majesty of that “prince of the mountains” imparts a portion of its own grandeur to all around; and the eye

turns ever and anon to seek rest and refreshment far up among the snows of Salmon. The very names of the mountain tell how it was signalized. It was "Sion," *the upheaved*; it was "Hermon," *the lofty peak*; it was "Sirion," *the breastplate*; it was a portion of "Lebanon," *the white mountain*; it was and is "Es Sheikh," *the prince of mountains*.

But if we might here leave the river for a little, and visit the region to the west and north-west, it would lead us to the place where the most northern of the cities of refuge stood (Josh. xx.) It is Kedesh-naphtali, now called Kudes, hidden in the recesses of the mountain, and notorious for the dishonesty of its people. The remains of the city show that it was a place of importance. It was here that Barak and Deborah lived, and prepared to deliver their country (Judges iv.); and all around, the broken columns and capitals convince some that Greek artists once attempted to adorn Kudes; while antiquities which point to a still more remote period are also found. There are immense door-posts here, some of them twenty feet high, assigned by a competent judge to the Jews who dwelt in this place in great numbers about the commencement of our era. Sarcophagi are also found in the vicinity, and rock tombs in the cliffs; so that even in this remote retreat we have before our eyes new proofs of those changes to which the land has been subject. But the mountains of Naphtali are unchanged; and the traveller who is not pressed for time may here wander amid park-like hills and deep ravines, to the utmost of his heart's content. There are gloomy gorges

here, where he may expect a meeting with the wolf, the wild boar, or the Arab—often as wild a prowler as either. But it is altogether a region of grandeur; and even amid its solemn wildness some gather fresh illustrations of the Bible. “Thou mayest not consume them [the people] at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee,” was an injunction to the Hebrews when they entered in to possess the land; and to this hour so numerous are these beasts, and so ready to increase, that the farmer goes to his plough gun in hand. The very shepherd needs to be armed as he guards his flocks; and some of the adventures recorded in Scripture, which wear to many an aspect of romance, might be repeated daily in some parts of modern Palestine.

It is amid such primitive scenes, for example, as those around Kudes, that we can realize most vividly the force and importance of some of the Arab usages. In this region the Arabs are manifestly faithful descendants of their father Ishmael, and the repute of Galilee does not improve in their keeping. Yet here a sheikh will press his hospitality on a wayfarer in a manner worthy of all imitation. He will fetch fresh-baked bread, and a supply of dibs—a kind of honey made from grapes—and, dipping the bread in the sweet liquid, press his guests to partake. The act renders him your brother, and you his ally. You are safe as far as his power can make you, for he feels bound to defend your life by his. It is a covenant between him and you, and that covenant he will die rather than break. Yet, in contrast, these very men glory in the profession of robbers, and would not scruple for an instant

to shoot down a victim for the sake of some trifling plunder. "They lie in wait secretly, as a lion in his den;"—these words are as true at this hour as they were in the days of David. They pitch their tents often among the ruins of ancient cities, and sally out to plunder as occasion offers; despising the dwellers in houses, the tillers of the ground, and all symptoms of industry, as ignoble, and unworthy of the fellowship of genuine Arabs—the proud sons of pillage. They curse the fertile spots by their annual visitations, wherever they dare descend, and are, in short, a multitude of free-booting Rob Roys; but far greater cowards than we have reason to believe that chieftain of the thieves to have been.

In the same region the traveller is amazed by the prodigious forests of oak which he has to traverse. Below Banias, and downward on either side of the river, they exist to an almost boundless extent. In Lebanon and Hermon, in Gilead and Bashan, and to the west, on some of the hills of Nazareth, and thence toward the sea-coast, silvan scenes of a majestic kind abound. One of the forests is reputed to be at least thirty miles long. In truth, like much besides in this land, these trees are a wonder. The blight of a present sterility is on it; but there are vestiges of a fecundity which, though latent, seems exhaustless still. In the days of David we know that such forests were common. Those who have traversed them in modern times come back to declare, that amid the rocky recesses of such retreats they can understand better than ever how Absalom perished in an oak tree. "The wood of

Ephraim" (2 Sam. xviii.) was well adapted for such a purpose, and in a flight after defeat could not fail to devour men like the sword itself. Dr. Thomson says: "It is interesting to know that the region where that battle was fought is still covered with such forests—that 'wood of Ephraim,' with thick oaks and tangled bushes, and thorny creepers growing over rugged rocks and ruinous precipices, down which the rebel army plunged in wild dismay, horses and men crushing each other to death in merciless ruin. Thus 20,000 men perished in that fatal wood, which 'devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.'"* In brief, whoever has wandered in these forests, which combine the properties of thicket, jungle, wild ravine, and forest all in one, will have no difficulty in comprehending how the rebel Absalom, entangled by his hair among the branches of the trees, and excited by fear and flight, should perish ingloriously that bloody day. The nature of the uplands in this region may be inferred from the fact, that in travelling down some of the wadies, the path is for miles roofed over with a dense canopy of bushes. Riding in the bed of the brook, the wayfarer must, at some places, cling to the neck of his horse, so as to be dragged through the silvan tunnel. Such a mode of travelling may continue for hours, exhibiting at once the wildness and the luxuriance of those mountain passes.

Few, perhaps, suppose that Palestine is so largely the haunt of wild beasts as we have already seen is the case; and the high lands between the fountains of the Jor-

* "The Land and the Book," chap. xxxii.

dan and the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee specially abound with them. Jackals make the night ring with their wild wailings. They yell, they scream, they bark in packs—especially when food is scarce; and the tombs, in that case, are often rifled of their contents by those starvelings. The wolf may be kept from the fold, but there are places where the hunger-driven leopard and panther clear the walls by one wild bound, and prey at pleasure on the flock. And when leading them to the mountain side, the shepherd, as already stated, is armed in order to defend them. Indeed, he must be ready at any moment to do battle for his charge; and when a leopard or a panther is his assailant and theirs, the fight is sometimes desperate and protracted. Against other robbers than wild beasts—namely, the lawless Bedawin—the shepherd must also often do battle, and sometimes he has to give his life for the sheep, in literal fulfilment of the Saviour's parable. The author of "The Land and the Book," whose descriptions of these scenes are pictorial, records that he once knew a shepherd cut to pieces by the khanjars of the Arabs, because he strove to drive them from his flock. And no wonder that encounters with wild beasts are not uncommon, when we read that some places are the chosen resort of leopards, wolves, hyenas, boars, and other wild animals; while gazelles, and other creatures of the deer tribe, with cranes, geese, ducks, grouse, partridges, and the solitary pelican, all haunt some of the more sequestered uplands.

Nor is it wonderful to be told, amid such abundance

of game, that at some places falconry is cultivated by the emirs and sheikhs. The hawks, Dr. Thomson says, are brought from Persia, and trained with great skill. Woodcocks and red-legged partridges are the most common game. The emir launches the bird as soon as his retainer has dislodged the prey from the covert; and the swoop is sudden, sure, and deadly. At some places even the gazelle is hawked—but only to retard or impede the timid creature in its flight, that it may be overtaken and become an easy prey.

Before altogether leaving the fertile region of which the Huleh is the centre, we may advert to the state of agriculture there. It is sufficiently primitive, and consists in little more than scratching the surface with a worthless implement called a plough. Ploughmen follow each other in close succession—six, eight, or even twelve in a row (1 Kings xix. 19); partly for mutual defence, and partly because the field is a common. The sower follows after, and casts his seed into the furrow, or rather the scratch; and this slovenly process has been followed from century to century for whole millenniums past. It will continue to be so until some better government direct the land, and a spirit of enterprise enter it,—when oppression shall have ceased to grind and to crush. The large-tailed Syrian sheep, which is common in the country from which it derives its name, is found in this section of Palestine. The tail is often fourteen pounds in weight, and is not seldom so large that it is not easy for a man to carry one of them. Fifty pounds in weight is spoken of as the heaviest known example.

Infidelity has sometimes mocked at the accounts of the fertility of Palestine given or implied in the Bible; but, in truth, those accounts can be verified at some places to this hour. In spite of forty centuries of miserable tillage, without manure or any of the appliances of modern culture, there are regions which produce crops called "splendid." They are spoken of as not less fertile than the very best land in the valley of the Mississippi, or even preferred, in point of fecundity, to anything in the West. It *was* a goodly land; nay, it continues to be so, in spite of two thousand years of oppression and misrule.

It is time, however, to leave the hills of Naphtali, and approach the Sea of Galilee. One glance back upon the region which we have traversed presents innumerable beauties. Hermon and Lebanon still reign supreme over all. The fountains diffusing greenness, the wadies supplying pasture, and the mountains garnished with oaks—the river's edge fringed with flowers, and earth and air teeming with life of every variety—the associations of the past, and the oppression of the present,—all combine to draw one by a strong attraction to this region; and when we turn away, it is somewhat as when we leave our home to go into exile. True, there are scenes here which repel: there are filthy habits, and, still worse, there are lawless ways among the people. But, after all, it is a portion of Messiah's land; and what Purchas, in his "Pilgrimage," wrote of Ceylon, is in a great measure true even of Northern Palestine: "The heavens with their dews—the air with a pleasant wholesomeness and fragrant

freshness—the waters in their many rivers and fountains—the earth diversified in aspiring hills, lowly vales, equal and indifferent plains, filled in her inward chambers with metals and jewels, in her outward court and upper face stored with whole woods present such scenes that no marvel though sense and sensuality have here stumbled on a paradise.”





V.

THE SEA OF GALILEE AND ITS ENVIRONS.

WE are next to glance at the most remarkable of all the scenes in Palestine, if we except, perhaps, the capital, Jerusalem. Did men estimate as they should do the events which happen on earth in their influence on eternity, rather than in their bearings upon time, this would be the scene to which ten thousand times ten thousand hearts would turn. A mere catalogue of the places on its borders would operate like a charm.

The Sea of Galilee, the Lake of Gennesaret, the Lake or Sea of Tiberias, will never be all described; but it may suffice for our present purpose if we first glance at the lake as a whole, and then visit the most remarkable places along its shores. As we proceed, we can scarcely help thinking of the practice of putting off the shoes when on holy ground.

There are many spots in Palestine where beauty crowds on beauty in admirable profusion. Anemones, orchises, and flowers of endless name and varied hue, perfume the air; birds, in their sweet concert, render the region vocal; and were we allowed, amid so much that pleases, to forget that man is man, the whole would yield an abundance of pleasure. The neighbour-

hood of the Sea of Galilee is, at some places, just such a spot. True, the change is great from the time when it could be said of this vicinity,—

“Fertile of corn the glebe, of oil, and wine;
With herds the pastures crowned, with flocks the hills.”

Where now are the *nine* cities and the numerous villages which stood upon the margin of the sea? Buried in nameless ruins. But there are relics enough to tell what the region once was; and the four springs in the Plain of Gennesaret which “pour forth their almost full-grown rivers” suffice to show that we are in the land which was promised abundance of brooks. The climate is tropical. The stately palm tree, with its feathery tuft, is there, though in diminished numbers—telling us why both David and his son so often selected it for their similitudes; while flowers in countless varieties proclaim the wisdom and the skill of Him who clothes them all in beauty. The lake itself is described as an irregular oval, about fourteen miles long, and, at the widest, nine miles across. It is about six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean; and, gazed at from any point of view, this sheet of water is one of admirable beauty,—“a burnished mirror, set in a framework of rounded hills and rugged mountains, which rise and roll backward and upward to where Hermon hangs the picture against the blue vault of heaven.”

Lochlomond, Windermere, the Lakes of Geneva, Locarno, and others, have been referred to, in order to convey some idea to fireside travellers of this wonder-

ful sheet of water ; but, after all, imagination would rather linger around it, exploring its haunts, and indulging the feelings—now sad, now joyous—which are evoked by the place, than circumscribe the wondrous scene by measurements or definitions.

The plain is exceedingly well watered, as a mere list of its streams and fountains may testify. The great fountain of Fuliye^h is one feeder of the lake ; those of El Mudowerah, Ain et Tiny, and Tabiga are others ; while up Wady Hamam there are still others. The streams from Rubudiyeh, or the Round Fountain, the Leimuny, and the Nahr Amud, water other parts. Sulam, Tellaiyeh, Jermaiah, Shukaiyif, and Semak enter the lake from the east. And these, though for the most part only summer brooks, in some degree explain the fertility of the region, while they help at seasons to increase the sea. Though the accounts of Josephus may be exaggerated, we see vestiges of at least their partial truth. All sorts of trees, he says, grow there ; for the temperature is so mixed that each kind finds what it needs. For ten months of the year grapes and figs grow there ; and though nearly all these productions have now disappeared, all that is needed to restore them is a protecting government and equal laws. By these means a tract of country about thirty furlongs in length, and twenty in breadth, would become prolific as of old.

It is well known that very different opinions are held by different travellers regarding some of the ruins round and near this lake. As to their extent, all are agreed ; but as to what these Tells and other remains

represent, opinions are as diverse as the theories of the metaphysicians. Capernaum and its site, for example, have led to as much earnest inquiry and painstaking as perhaps any question of antiquity deserves; but it is not our object even to dip into the controversy. We incline, however, and strongly, to the opinion that the modern Tell Hum represents the ancient Capernaum. At all events, quite near the upper end of the lake, where the Jordan enters, that city stood of old; and the Saviour's words when he foretold its doom may there be felt in the fulness of their power. Ruins are frequent, and it is evident that a large town once stood at no great distance from the lake. Heaps of lava boulders, and other tokens of former buildings, line the shore. Columns, entablatures, cornices, and other fragments, as of a temple, are found in the vicinity. The luxuriance of the vegetation all around is tropical, and there are clumps of oleanders there which are twenty feet high and a hundred feet in circumference,—“a blushing pyramid of exquisite loveliness.”

And it is meet that even the desolation of the abode of Jesus should be beautiful. Here he often had his home; here he did many of his wonderful works. The earth here has been trodden by his feet; the waters here have been a marble pavement to him; and heaven and earth have been drawn nearer by the presence here and the sojourn of God manifest in the flesh. The love of the Eternal was here incarnate; and here we can more easily hold communion with Him who said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father also.” These

things throw a halo round this spot, which is surpassed, if surpassed, in brightness only by Nazareth, Bethany, and Jerusalem. One who loved his Lord, and now is with him, sang, and we may repeat,—

“ How pleasant to me thy deep blue wave,
O Sea of Galilee!
For the glorious One who came to save
Hath often stood by thee.

It is not that the wild gazelle
Comes down to drink thy tide;
But He that was pierced to save from hell
Oft wandered by thy side.”

To be thus brought into a kind of personal contact with the Saviour, through these localities, gives rise to thoughts which words cannot utter. On this very spot of ground he may have stood; in that very creek his boat may have been moored; in that bay he may have called Andrew and Peter, James and John, or addressed the crowd on the shore from the ship in which he was “thrust out from the land. It is a topographical comment on the Gospels. James and John are easily reproduced here; Peter and Andrew, without any effort, ply their former trade upon the lake; and the tie between the Truth and the soul is strengthened manifold.

All who have visited the Sea of Galilee report the sad impression made by the dreary loneliness which reigns there. Not an inhabited house can be found, at some places, for miles. Where town after town or village after village once stood, with their teeming population counted by thousands, only ruins, ruins

continually, are found. The very fishermen who once plied their trade upon the lake testified, by their numbers, the extent of the population; and Bethsaida, or "the house of fish," tells the same tale. But now no Peter, nor James, nor John, nor Andrew is there; no fishermen and no boats are seen near the lake. Fish is abundant, but the very art of building boats is lost; and though some clumsy attempts may be made with clumsy nets, the waters are never rifled of their copious tenantry. Indeed, the Arabs despise fishing; they have no patience with it. They despise the sea; and the waves which have borne boats in hundreds, in other years, are now unruffled by a single keel. There are birds in the jungle; there are storks, wild ducks, and other aquatic fowls on the waters; sometimes the vulture, and occasionally the eagle and the pelican, are found in this region of solitude; but so profound is it that it saddens even the gayest. The gentle gush of the waves, as they break languidly on the beach, is often all that is heard marring the terrible stillness. "The saddened traveller," one has said, "may gaze for hours over the scene without observing a single human being, or indeed any living creature, save the large water-fowl, whose presence tends rather to increase than to diminish the desolation of the view." What a contrast this with the living, jubilant condition of these shores when Jesus was here!*

* Six different kinds of fish are found in the lake,—the Musht, the Abu But, the Huffafah, the Abu Kisher, the Burbut, and the Biinni; and this fact may suffice to explain why, as some think, two of its ancient cities were called "The House of Fish"—one on the east, and the other on the west bank of the Jordan.

Some have supposed that this lake is the crater of a huge volcano. The waters, we have seen, are more than six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean; and a phenomenon so strange has given rise to not a little speculation. Is it to be traced to some mighty convulsion which occurred in the neighbourhood, affecting the contour or altering the organic structure of the country? We cannot reply. Indeed, engrossed with the present, one is here little disposed to speculate much regarding the past. Where we may make the circuit of a sheet of water thirteen or fourteen miles long, eight or nine broad, and at its greatest depth about one hundred and sixty-five feet, and not meet a human being except at one place—Tiberias—the desolation seems so complete that one is rivetted by it. The palms, the fig trees, and Oriental productions have nearly all disappeared. The lake is given up to gloomy depopulation, which haunts the mind with the force of a present calamity.

Two things, however, we may do to mitigate this monotony: First, we may sail upon the Sea of Galilee; and, secondly, make the circuit of its shores, for the sake of the scriptural associations which still meet us there.

The voyage may not be free from danger. The wind may rush down upon the lake, and the waters may quickly pass from serenity to tumult,—from the quietness of sleeping infancy to the commotion of a wildly weltering caldron. If such a tempest were to arise as arose on the Redeemer and his disciples of old, the pleasure sail would become sadly changed; for

Gennesaret has lost none of its ancient repute for sudden squalls, occasioned partly by the heat of the depressed basin attracting the cold air of the adjacent mountains down the deep gorges formed by the descending streams. Yet, if we were to set sail from Tiberias, with smiling weather, and coast thence northward to Magdala, to the Plain of Gennesaret, to the shore near Chorazin and Bethsaida, then to the eastern shore, to Gergasa, and Gamala, and then to the exit of the Jordan from the lake, and so round to Tiberias, the point of starting, using the New Testament at once for our chart and our directory, this melancholy sea might ever after be closely linked in our minds with the memories of many a spot which is interwoven for ever with the history and the glories of redemption. We should, at least, find a marvellous transition from the time when there were fishermen by hundreds on the lake,* when boats of traffic or of pleasure were rife; when the stir and commotion of the multitudes who dwelt upon these shores helped to make the sea what it has been called—"The Sea of Life;" and when the two cities built by Herod and his brother Philip—namely, Tiberias and Julias—made the northern section of the sea a rival for Baïæ of old, or for the Lake of Como in our day.

But it is when we traverse the sea-beach that such impressions become the deepest. Proceeding from Tiberias again—a place which, it is believed, the

* One modern mode of fishing here should be mentioned. Bread crumbs are mixed with bi-chloride of mercury, and scattered on the water. The fish eat them, die of poison, and so are caught.

Saviour never entered*—we soon arrive at what was once Magdala, now Mejdal—a miserable hamlet of a few huts, situated on the southern shore, and inhabited by a sunken people. This was the home of Mary Magdalene, so mysteriously delivered from a seven-fold oppressor by our Lord. But no memory of that deliverance now floats about the place; and though its degraded people have constantly before their eyes its scenes of wondrous beauty, they continue degraded still. One gladly hastens away from a spot so morally offensive, and soon reaches the debatable land of the region—that on which antiquaries do friendly battle regarding the site of Capernaum; but traversing the Plain of Gennesaret in its length, and admiring its richness, we shun controverted topics, and pass onward, and a little inland, to Chorazin. Crossing Wady Nashif, Khorazy is at no great distance; and as soon as it is reached, the whole scene attests the complete fulfilment of the Saviour's predictions,—for he is true alike to his threats and his promises. No doubt, there is controversy regarding this site also, but perhaps without a cause. The black basalt and the huge boulders of the vicinity are a meet environment for a place so thoroughly curse-stricken. Next the traveller reaches the place where the Jordan enters the lake,—a broad river, fordable a short way up, but more and more worthy of its historical celebrity. It is still the haunt of the buffalo. But we are in quest of scriptural sites; and Bethsaida, another doomed city, comes

* For an account of the city of Tiberias, see "The Cities of the Promised Land."

next. According to Dr. Thomson, it stood upon both sides of the Jordan; and he pleads the existence of mounds and ruins in defence of his opinion. Julias—a place repaired by Philip the tetrarch, and raised to the dignity of a town, under the name just mentioned, to honour the daughter of the Roman emperor of that day—is conjectured to be the next of the sites, though here, again, controversy is keen. The knot of difficulty seems to be cut by supposing that Bethsaida was divided into two—an eastern and a western town; and one would gladly welcome certainty regarding the native town of Andrew and Peter, and Philip.

Further: it was in this vicinity that the Redeemer, by an act the most closely resembling creation of all that he performed, fed five thousand with what was little more than a morsel (Luke ix. 10-17). It is a region of flowers and of beauty now—the rival of the Plain of Gennesaret, on the other side of the lake; and in such a place faith may lead us as near to the creative act as aught on earth can enable us to do. But passing now to the eastern side of the lake, we enter the country of some of the fiercest Arab tribes. They plunder wherever they can. They glory in the profession of robbers, and boast at once their right and their purpose to live by their own good swords; their life, in truth, is as wild as the tempests on the lake. There are spots on this beach, however, which amply repay the risk that is run by venturing among these outlaws. Difficulties regarding the scriptural topography, sometimes obscure, because the allusions are so brief, are often cleared up by a single glance given on the spot.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are all consistent *there*: they seem inconsistent only to our ignorance. But crossing some of the wadies which act as funnels for the storms, our next glimpse along the eastern shore may be at Gergasa, or Gersa. The walls of the ancient city can still be traced; and one is glad to be able to identify, with some degree of certainty, the site of that place where the Saviour cured two men who were possessed with devils, and where the legion entered into the swine. Like many other sites, indeed, this is an arena for debate; but strong probabilities are in its favour. The mountain down which rushed the unclean animals, rendered still more unclean by the circumstances, is found there, or at least one that would have served the purpose. "An immense mountain rises directly above it," is the language employed to describe the scene; and it seems impossible to identify a spot if this be not identified. Nearly all around the lake there is a smooth beach, supplying at some places a tolerable road. Here, however, the overhanging mountain and the rush down its side would secure the precipitation; so that the miracle and the topography are once more at one.

Some ravines of indescribable wildness, black, basaltic, and leafless, debouch on the eastern side of the lake. These, added to the lawless habits of the plundering tribes from the Gaulanitis, or the Hauran,—some of whom are known by the picturesque title of Diabs, or "wolves,"—or, in their absence, the utterly deserted state of the shore, render a visit one of awe rather than enjoyment. Warm baths are found

at Mizferah. Then the ruins of Gamala, or Kulat Husn, the scene of struggles the most intense during the Roman invasion of Palestine, or about the year 70, are found close to the lake. The deeds of daring and endurance which marked its siege in the year 69, and the utter desolation which swept over it, and destroyed its inhabitants, form one of the most remarkable portions of the records of the Hebrews just before they were expelled from their own land. The remains of ancient architecture, the traces of ancient power, and the memory of the massacres and bloodshed which these ruins have witnessed, together with the striking contour of the adjoining region, combine to render a visit to Gamala one of the most memorable that can be made. Here a Corinthian capital formed of basalt; there the remains of a fort strong enough to retard even the victorious Roman: at one place the remains of a temple or a synagogue; at another the debris of the wall which repelled the on-rolling tide of the victors, as a rock the sea:—all help to show us what this land once was, and to deepen the effects of the contrast between that and what it now is. Gamala is, perhaps, the best preserved ruin in Palestine, and no one can linger amid its dilapidations without realizing in some measure the terrible struggle which it cost the Romans to dislodge the Jews from the land they loved so well.

Various ruins are scattered over the region as we proceed southward along the eastern shore, and the country opens up into a plain of some extent, namely, that of Semak, with a village of that name containing

about two hundred huts. Along that plain we reach the point at which the river breaks away from the sea. Here jasper-stones, chalcedony, agate, and others, are found on the beach; and ducks, cranes, and other water-fowls abound. Where the river leaves the lake, the depth is scarcely more than four feet, the width about one hundred. The ruins of a bridge near the outlet prevent the free outflow of the waters. But in truth, a meditative visitor is sometimes tempted to turn aside from inanimate nature to study man, degraded, abject, polluted, and polluting, even amid such lovely scenes. The people here are Moslem robbers,—Diabs or “wolves” by name, and scarcely less by nature; their village filthy as a mud-heap, themselves sunk below the power of everything but God’s truth and the Redeemer’s love to lift them up. “And yet,” Dr. Thomson exclaims, “it is situated on the shore of this sweet and beautiful lake, with the most interesting scenery in the world around it. Alas! it is a splendid ‘jewel in a swine’s snout.’”

From this neighbourhood we can survey nearly the entire range of the lake. At the southern extremity it is not more than three miles wide. The exit of the river is at the south-west corner; near to which is Kerak, the ancient Tarichea, and the naval station of the Jews, when they were in force to fight the Romans with two hundred and thirty ships somewhere near this place. How changed now, when not more than one poor craft—if that—can be found upon these waters! “I never but once saw a single sail unfurled upon its deserted bosom,” is the exclamation of

a modern traveller, as he describes this sea. As if the storms which still at times sweep over it, and lash it into a tempest, had submerged them all for ever, its surface is seldom disturbed by even a single keel.

In proceeding from the exit of the river we pass the warm baths of Emmaus, about an hour from Kerak. To the west lie the ruins of an ancient aqueduct, supposed to have been designed to convey water to the gardens of Tarichea, Emmaus, and Tiberias, or to the sugar plantations which are known to have existed there in former times. The vicinity is marked by some ruins, and amid these we pass on to the baths of Emmaus, conjectured to be Hammoth of Naphtali. The water used here is sulphureous, and the odour is very offensive; but the virtues of the springs are valued so highly that multitudes crowd to the scene. The filthiness of the place is so great as to repel those who are at all fastidious; and as there is only one bathing cistern, the bathers must be communists in a serious sense. Yet the buffalo does not lounge or loll in his bath of black mud more joyfully than do the bathers in the disgusting receptacle. Besides the warm springs here there are others at Mendhour, further down the stream, and at various places in the Ghor.

Such is a mere glimpse of this sea, as it now sleeps in beauty between Tiberias on the west, and Gergasa on the east; Bethsaida or Capernaum on the north, and Kerak on the south. Were any attempt made here to exhaust the attractions of this neighbourhood, it would be right to dwell upon the clouds of doves

which may often be seen. There is a gorge, for example, called Hamam, from the flocks of pigeons which there nestle in the rocks. That gorge is one of the most arresting in the land. Its lofty precipices were of old the haunts of robbers who defied everything but royal power, and whom only Herod was able to dislodge from their impregnable caves near Arbela, now Irbid. But those bloody men have now given place to the peaceful dove, and as we penetrate this gorge, if the wild excitement which it occasions permit, we can recall much of what is said in the Scriptures regarding that bird which gives its modern name to the glen. At some places in Syria pigeon-houses are built, where thousands nestle; but here they are among the rocks, secure from all attacks. Strong, fleet, and wild as they are, their mournful notes at times fill the air, which they darken in their rapid flight (Isa. lx. 8). They are of an iron-gray or slate colour, and their habits in many respects illustrate the allusions of the Bible. The doves "taboring on their breasts" (Nahum ii. 7), refers to a peculiar habit of one breed, which can swell out the crop so as to make it rest on their breast, and thus represent the mourners who use tabrets in those lands, and rest the instrument on the bosom.

But many other illustrations of Scripture in connection with this favourite and emblematic bird meet us here and elsewhere in Palestine. Whether to set forth female beauty, or to symbolize truth in its loftiest forms, we are sent to the dove for instruction; and the multitudes of that bird which crowd the precipitous glen of Hamam indicate how naturally David,

and Solomon, and Isaiah fetched their figures from a winged thing so beautiful and so well known. The turtle-dove in an olive grove is one of the favourite figures of Oriental poetry, and we have already had occasion to refer to the flocks of other birds which abound in this land. The sparrow, for example, is a tame and troublesome bird in Palestine; and their mourning on the house-top when they have lost their mates, or their cheapness in the market because of their abundance, may be verified before the traveller's eyes at many places in the East. In some districts, as in the Huleh, they are literally countless; and hawks follow in their train very much as the whale is said to follow the herring shoal.

Upon Tiberias we do not dwell at length, though its antiquity and its rank as one of the four sacred cities of the modern Jews—Hebron, Jerusalem, and Saphed being the other three—perhaps entitle it to an ample notice.* Near it multitudes of the outcast Hebrews from all lands desire to die and to be buried. It was built by Herod, and named after Tiberius; but there is reason to believe that a city more ancient than Herod's previously stood upon the spot. As the place was designed for a royal abode, it was adorned with great magnificence; and the fragments of granite columns, and other relics of ancient grandeur, which are found in the neighbourhood, attest, in some degree, the decoration of the scene. But dust to dust, ashes to ashes, vileness to corruption: all its glory was a fading flower. There are about four thousand inhabitants in modern

* See "The Cities of the Bible."

Tiberias, of whom perhaps one thousand are Jews ; yet the place has been likened to a city of the dead. The space within the walls is not half covered with houses ; not a few of those which are there are miserable huts ; and, in short, the place is a focus of squalid and disgusting wretchedness. What though the climate be tropical, and some productions in the neighbourhood be such as to vie with those of the most favoured lands ?—man is vile, and his vileness affects all besides.

“The various seasons woven into one,
And that one season an eternal spring,”

form no antidote to the misery of guilt ; and this city is therefore another scene of dreary desolation. The Jewish burial-place is peculiarly sacred. A famous rabbi lies interred there, and fourteen thousand of his scholars lie buried around him ; for even in death the Jews are deluded.

Night amid these scenes wears a loveliness which our cloudy skies cannot rival ; it is, in truth, just a more sober form of day. Moonlight is actually brilliant ; starlight comes over the soul with a subduing influence which in some cases approaches to pain ; and the solemn stillness which reigns, permitting the faintest or the most distant sound to be heard, prepares the soul, of the believer at least, for those communings which have in them more of heaven than of earth. Mere poetry, mere romance apart, his feelings turn at such hours to Him who spent whole nights alone in prayer amid these very scenes. Yon moon shone upon Him ; these stars shed down their light ;

this, or such a stillness, was broken only by His cry, "Even so, Father; for so it seemeth good in thy sight;" and though earth by itself has no power to connect us with the Holy One, this land, these scenes, combining with the word, do help us to feel nearer to Him who wrought out redemption here—

"And o'erpaid its value with His blood."

Nowhere in the world are "the solemn mysteries of night" so profound or so suggestive as here.

Standing on the promontory near Tiberias, we might recall many of the scenes which have made this region historical and more. We might gaze upwards to the Horns of Hattin, where the cause of the Crusaders became hopeless, when Saladin vanquished their hosts, and took their sacred standard; or we might try to trace the scenes of some of the Saviour's parables, and fancy would willingly help us in the task; or we might gaze upon its waters as evening closed in, when all is so still that it seems as if the world were dying,—or at day-dawn and sunrise, when all is so passing fair that it seems like a young world just rising into being,—or in the depths of night, with the moon on high, a rival for the sunshine of other lands. But even after we had gazed upon this scene under every light and from every point, one overmastering consideration evermore keeps possession of the mind,—the Son of God dwelt there, and there prepared to die for the sons of men. The mountains may be bleak or clothed in verdure, according to the season, they may be lower or loftier than we thought; the plains may be broader or narrower,

and the waters deeper, bluer, and more peaceful than our eye ever rested on before; there may be an awful stillness, an oppressive sense of loneliness, such as once prompted a wayfarer in this land to exclaim, "Thank God, we have seen a man!" or there may be an elemental war, that turns the lake into one tumultuating mass of billows; but whatever be the aspect, what attractions can equal this one fact,—the Son of God, the Son of man dwelt here, taught here, endured here, that the sons of Adam might have hope?

Here wonder after wonder was wrought to lift man's thoughts to heaven.

Here God in very deed dwelt on earth among men, that men might dwell with God in heaven.

By this sea the Eternal wrought deliverances at once for the soul and the body.

He shed light upon the dark; he gave life to the dead; he prepared righteousness for the sinful, and purity for the defiled.

It is not the transparency of its waters; it is not the blending of tints upon its shores; it is not the battles on sea or land of Josephus and the Romans;—it is because Christ here cast out the unclean spirits; here healed the sick of the palsy; here preached the gospel to wondering crowds—not the righteous, but sinners; here said, in accents which have often sounded as sweetly as if man had heard the music of the skies, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;"—it is these and countless other facts that explain the attractions of this lake. Genius has described it; science has ex-

plored it; poetry has sung it; eloquence has dwelt in raptures on its beauty; but this one fact overshadows them all,—the Son of God dwelt there, and there prepared to die for the sinful children of men.

“Graceful around thee the mountains meet,
Thou calm reposing sea;
But ah! far more, the beautiful feet
Of Jesus walked o’er thee.”

When its waters were agitated by a sudden tempest, the Prince of Peace once rebuked them, “and there was a great calm;” and the sight of them sleeping in their deep blue beauty produces effects somewhat similar in the meditative mind. Even though that serenity may be tinged with sadness, it seems all the more befitting a world where man’s only sure portion is trouble—his only sure resting-place, a grave.

In Eden we see God and man estranged by a violent disruption, whose effects we hear in the groans, or witness in the tears, the agonies, and the deaths of a race. But by the shores of this sea, the believer can trace the unfolding of the plan, or the progress of the work by which God is to knit earth to heaven again, to “make an end of transgression,” and fit his sons and his daughters for glory. The strains which hailed the new-born Redeemer—“Glory to God in the highest”—were deepened and prolonged by the shores of Genesaret. Reverberated from its mountains, they are circulating round the globe; and happy is the soul which can hear, and hearing, believes. The calmest or the sunniest hour upon that sea is but a feeble type of the blessedness of such a spirit.

Had the traveller in the Holy Land what all travellers there should have, namely, time at command, he should diverge from the Ghor to the west, near the lower extremity of the Sea of Galilee. Nazareth and many other scenes invite him to do so; but we advert only to—

MOUNT TABOR.

This conspicuous height deserves to be visited alike for its own beauty and the associations which gather round it. The Wady Bireh carries the waters of the district in a small silvery thread eastward to the Jordan; Wady Sherrar drains another section; and the mount rises about half way between the Ghor and the Plain of Esdraëlon.

Approached from the west or north-west, this beautiful hill has the appearance of a truncated cone; from the south-west it resembles the segment of a sphere. There are various pathways to the summit, which can be reached without difficulty on horseback. The slopes are covered with oaks and other trees, supplying a delightful shade while they add to the rich beauty of the place. The mountain itself consists entirely of limestone. The Arabs call it *Jebel et Tur*,—a title which they apply also to Mount Olivet, as well as other places. As the mount is insulated to a considerable degree, the view which it commands is very extensive. Its height is estimated by some at rather less than 1000 feet, though others reckon it more than 1300 feet above the plain, while its base is more than 400 above the sea; so that the absolute height is

nearly 1800. The top is an oblong plain or basin, twelve or fifteen minutes in length, and from six to eight in breadth. The foundations of former edifices are found there in great abundance; and near them there are some tanks where water is collected and preserved. The ruins belong to different ages, and the whole summit was originally surrounded by a strong wall whose foundations, composed of large bevelled stones, can still be traced. The remains of towers and bastions are also visible. At some places there are piles of ruins, consisting of walls, arches, and other kinds of building, including some dwelling-houses. Traces of a fortress are also described, and a tall pointed arch is said to assign it to the Saracens as the builders. The bevelled stones point back to Roman ascendancy, at least, while the churches and monasteries built by the Crusaders account for other portions of these remains. A rude cellar containing an altar is used as a place for celebrating an annual Mass by a monk from Nazareth, which is at the distance of five or six miles west from the mount. Here again, however, the Greeks compete with the Latins, and have their altar also, commemorating the transfiguration of the Saviour, which tradition assigns to this hill top. On the day of the Greek festival thousands of pilgrims are said to resort to the scene. Some remain there forty days at a time, and have for their companions wild hogs which lurk and luxuriate among the oak forests and the syringa groves of the slopes.

The view from the summit of Tabor is described as one of the most magnificent in Palestine. The Medi-

terranean is seen on the west, with Esdraëlon and the sea-board in the foreground. To the north, the Horns of Hattin, Safed, but, above all, Hermon, are visible. Sweeping round to the north-east, the basin of the Lake of Tiberias, and a portion of the lake itself, come into view, with the Jaulan and the Hauran heights for a background. Away beyond the Jordan, the mountains of Bashan and Gilead, and southward the Ghor itself, though not the waters of the river, are all included. Nain, En-dor, the Castle of Belvoir of crusading times, now Kaukab el Hawa, on the margin of the Jordan valley; the mountains of Gilboa, Carmel, and Little Hermon, with many other spots made familiar by the Scriptures, all cluster round Tabor, and induce the visitor to linger on its summit. At no great distance, on the Plain of Esdraëlon, and around it, villages spring up wherever there are fountains; and they are not few. Indeed, in this region, water is abundant; and as we pass southward into Samaria, its mountains and streams, we enter a country more like our western parts than any other in the land.

The historical references to Mount Tabor are somewhat numerous. We must dismiss the tradition which makes it the scene of the transfiguration; for there is nothing to substantiate that opinion, except just the fact that the tradition exists. As the place where Deborah and Barak assembled their army (Judges iv. 6)—as suggesting poetical thoughts to David (Ps. lxxxix. 12), and weighty words to the prophets—Tabor has Old Testament attractions; but so far are we from having any ground for the tradition regarding the

transfiguration, that it is not once named in the New. The city or stronghold on the summit. underwent siege after siege, and submitted to master after master. About fifty-three years before Christ came, ten thousand Jews were slain in a battle fought with the Romans near Mount Tabor. It was fortified anew in the times of Josephus ; and in the fourth century the tradition already referred to took its rise. It became, of course, the site of a church ; and those corruptions of the gospel, which are well-nigh the only form of it known in Palestine, seized upon Mount Tabor as another stronghold. Three churches, corresponding to the three tabernacles which Peter proposed to erect, were founded there in the sixth century ; and in the seventh they are referred to, but now with the addition of a monastery. In the times of the Crusades Tabor became a centre, and black friars from France were stationed in a monastery there ; but when the Saracens became masters of Tabor, A.D. 1113, the convent was pillaged, and the monks were massacred. The place, however, recovered from that shock. Superstition regained the ascendant, and, after passing through various fortunes under the renowned Saladin and his brother, Melek-el-Adil, a fortress and the other buildings on the summit were demolished ; and they remain to this day very much in the condition in which they were left in the year 1263, when they were finally overthrown by Sultan Bibars. In less than a quarter of a century from that date the ruins became the lair of wild beasts, and they continue so still. In the year 1799 a battle was fought at Mount Tabor between the Arabs and

the French. Kleber, reinforced by Napoleon in person, obtained a signal victory ; and that day the Kishon did for the fugitives what it had done for the troops of Sisera when routed by Deborah and Barak three thousand years before. In short, Tabor is just a miniature of this whole land. It has passed from lord to lord, till they are nearly as numerous as the centuries which are gone. Canaanites, Jews, Greco-Macedonians, Romans, Christians, Saracens, Franks, Turks, are all named among the masters of Tabor. It remains, however, as one of the fairest sites in Palestine, and may be climbed again and again, and yet again, as well for its intrinsic beauty as for its noble position. -





VI.

FROM THE SEA OF GALILEE TO THE PLAINS OF THE JORDAN.

NEAR the place where the river leaves the "sea," there is a bridge called Jisr el Kunatur, which lay in the line of the highway from Palestine proper to the regions east of the Jordan. It is supposed to have consisted of ten arches, but the piles of rubbish near it render it difficult to count them. The river here is about three hundred feet wide, and may be forded when the stream is not in flood. About seven miles below the lake another bridge—that of Mujamia—is found; and in this neighbourhood, it is remarked by all, the river turns and twists itself, as if averse to enter on the course which ends in the Dead Sea. Within a single mile from its exit, it is found running in no fewer than four directions; first northward, then to the west, then south-east, and finally south. Its numerous windings, its rapids, its cataracts, its islets, with the beauty or the sterility of its shores, have all been duly chronicled; but its windings and circumvolutions are not the least remarkable features in its history.

After passing the village of Abadiyeh, a few miles below the exit, the valley is occupied, as far as it is

occupied at all, by the wretched Bedawin, most of whom despise honest labour, and glory in robbery alone. Not one inhabited village is found on the margin of the Jordan till we reach the site of Jericho. The river may roll amid Eastern richness and numerous ruins ; it may rush down precipices, or glide sluggishly on its way ; but everywhere desolation reigns. It is the widespread characteristic of the region. Yet Nature, with her horn of plenty, does not forget the scene. At some places the banks of the river are richly covered with herbage ; and the scarlet anemone, marigold, water lily, and asphodel, are mentioned among its decorations. At some places the land is clothed three feet deep with flowers. Madame de Stael was right in the sentiment already quoted regarding Rome and the Tiber. What shall be said of having such access to the Jordan ? A short way below the lake the waters deepen to about ten feet ; and as we float upon their bosom, or wander by their margin, Mount Hermon—still the Sheikh of the scene—glitters in the north. The whole is at least the ruins of a delightful land.

It is now ascertained that the Jordan abounds in dangerous rapids, which demand the utmost nautical skill to shoot them without boatwreck. They foam so fiercely that descent is at some places impossible ; and whether it be the ruins of former bridges, or the geological formation of the bed, these spots are both dangerous and numerous. Along the line of the stream there are symptoms of former activity, in dilapidated aqueducts, ruined mills, and broken-down sluices. The river at some places is one hundred and sixty feet

wide, and two and a-half deep ; but further down the depth is eight feet or more. Canes grow at some places on the margin. Wild vines also appear, with oleanders, tamarisks, and other shrubs ; and the animals are represented by fish, storks, and wild ducks. At the whirlpool of Bukah there are further proofs of former activity ; but the robber hordes demolish all wherever they dare, and the poor peasants are glad to flee from their wild and fiery assailants. The whoop of the owl amid decaying huts, and the song of the bulbul among the leafy fringes of the stream, may together greet the traveller here ; but “ nine rapids, three of them terrific ones,” within the compass of a single day’s march, drown all sounds except their own, though the wild, rough, Arab music *is* adapted to such scenes. The oak, the cedar, the laurustinus, the tamarisk, the arbutus, and other trees, here decorate the Ghor, composed as it is of two hollows—that in which the river flows, and a wider and more extensive channel, formed by loftier banks, as if the river of former ages had been much larger than the present one.

It would be pleasant to linger about this place, and observe such rustic scenes as are here presented ;—for example, a shepherd conducting his flock across the stream, whether as a wayfarer or to find more copious pasturage. It is a busy scene for the shepherd, and a trying one for the sheep. The stronger animals easily follow him, and stem the stream ; but the weaker are often in danger of being washed down and lost. The attention of the guardian is mainly directed to them ; and the whole scene has furnished to devout minds a

vivid representation of the care of Him who could say, that of all whom the Father had given him not one was lost.

1. THE VALLEY OF THE JERMUK.

Where this river—the ancient Hieromax—joins the Jordan, about two hours and a half from Tiberias, the tributary is about one hundred and thirty feet wide, with a moderate current, but throwing a large volume of water into the Jordan, over a rough, rocky channel, spanned by a stone bridge, and producing or increasing some rapids near the junction. The Jermuk is said by Lynch to be nearly as deep as the Jordan ; and its current at some places is very rapid, averaging eight miles in an hour. It rises, according to some authorities, in a small lake nearly a mile in circumference, about thirty miles to the east of the Jordan, abounding in fish of a beautiful kind. The supply of water for the lake is perennial, and the adjacent country is described as one of great beauty, having Bashan on the north and Gilead on the south. As there are many streams in the vicinity, these both explain the attractions of the region and supply feeders to the Jermuk. At the distance of some miles up the valley from the Jordan, there are hot baths at Hammath, in Wady Mendhour, similar to those at Emmaus. The fountains are described as being of immense size, and the district is one of very great interest. On the south of the great gorge of the Jermuk stand the remains of Gadara, now Um-Keis, or “the mother of ruins.” They consist of

temples, theatres, and other structures, reared on the top of a mountain; and some of these remains are both tasteful and massive. In former times it was customary for the Nazarenes from the other side of the river to hold an annual fair at the baths; but the Bedawin, who scourge and oppress these people, have now rendered such meetings impossible, or at least unsafe. Pompey the Great, in the day of his power, could found or renew Gadara. By his influence he could command its huge columns to be reared in the very desert. But who shall tame the wild desolaters of this and many adjacent regions? The Valley of the Jermuk is wild and precipitous, and partakes largely of the general character of the wadies in this district. This river belongs to the country of the gigantic Og, king of Bashan, in whose dominions part of the twelve tribes were located. Few, perhaps, who have thought of the desolation of these parts, would expect to hear them thus described only ten years ago:—"As the traveller recedes from the.....Jordan into the heart of this region, the scenery becomes very magnificent. Trees, which had before been scarce, begin to occur first singly, then in clumps and groves, and at length in forests. The roads wind in the most picturesque manner along the sides of the mountains, or round the fantastic hills, through secluded valleys and narrow rocky gorges overhung with precipices, out of the sides and clefts of which springs at every turn the Valonidi oak, the characteristic tree of this part of the country. In the valley, the oleanders, which everywhere border the beds of the winter torrents, grow to a great

size, and are uncommonly superb, especially when covered with their masses of magnificent blossom."

Such fairs as that referred to as held till lately in the Valley of the Jermuk are scenes of great interest to the visitor. There all the productions of the region are found collected on the spot, while others are brought from afar. Cotton, barley, wheat, Indian corn, horses, donkeys, with cattle, flocks and their produce, cheese and leben—all are brought together on some of these occasions. Honey, chickens, eggs, figs, raisins, apples, melons, grapes, and all fruits in their season, swell the stores; and whether we would study Eastern costumes, or dive into the mysteries of Eastern traffic, both ends may be promoted amid such gatherings. Whether it be shoes for men, or shoes for horses—all are there, and all commended by their venders in stentorian tones, and with the passionate earnestness for which Orientals are noted wherever they are deeply interested.

But from the Oriental excitement of such scenes it is pleasant to pass on to the quietness and grandeur of the glen of the Jermuk and its tributary wadies, as well as the whole region stretching back to Lebanon. At some places, sights are witnessed there which surpass those of most other lands; and Van de Velde has said concerning some of them, that he had travelled in no part of the world where views so glorious and manifold occurred in so narrow a compass. "Not the luxurious Java," he says; "not the richly wooded Borneo, and the majestic Sumatra or Celebes; not the paradise-like Ceylon; far less the grand but naked mountains of South Africa, or the low impenetrable

woods of the West Indies, yield such views. What a solemn feeling creeps over us here !”

Proceeding down the river, the next object to be noticed is the Jisr Mejamia, or “bridge of the meeting-place.” The Jordan in this vicinity is deep, narrow, and impetuous: the rocks are basaltic, the fall precipitous, and the whole aspect of the place is different from all our notions of the quiet and majestic Jordan. There are the remains of a khan here; and the bridge, which gracefully spans the river, has one large and three smaller Saracenic arches below, and six smaller ones above them. The river flows through the central arch. This bridge is on the road from Nablous to Damascus, and leads through scenes famed alike in story sacred and profane.

As we proceed along the course of the river, the proofs of desolation seem to become more abundant. The large crops of thistles, spreading over countless acres; the miserable attempts at culture by handfuls of men, who must reap what they sow with sword and spear rather than with sickle; combined with the utter barrenness of many places,—all tend to make a journey down the river mournful as a funeral procession. At certain seasons the hot and steaming earth in the Ghor seems to make it a rival for the desert itself.

2. BEISAN, OR BETH-SHAN.

It is more than worth while to journey from the Ghor of the Jordan four or five miles westward up the

Ghor of Beisan, certainly one of the most remarkable scenes in Palestine. It is the Beth-shan of the Bible, and the Scythopolis of the Greeks. Ascending the Ghor to an elevation of four hundred or five hundred feet above the level of the Jordan, the traveller reaches that part of the great Valley of Jezreel; and few spots on earth, Dr. Thomson says, and none in this land, possess greater advantages for manufacturing purposes; and yet it is a desert.* Water power is abundant; land of the richest kind stretches out at some points far as the eye can reach;—yet all is neglected now; though it has not been always so, for Beisan contains incontestable evidence of its strength as a stronghold. The remains of towers constructed of bevelled blocks of white limestone; of a castle of no mean pretensions; of the different wards of the city, divided from each other by ravines and waterfalls; a bridge of extraordinary height spanning the Jalud; the Wady Jalud on the north side of the Tell, and Wady

* It may show with what care some parts of Palestine have been explored, to submit the following:—"I once came to Beisan," Dr. Thomson says, "direct from Tiberias in little more than six hours. . . . Thus: half an hour to the Baths; one and a half to Kerak, at the outgoing of the Jordan; two hours to El Mansûrah; two and a half to the entrance of the Jermuk into the Jordan; three hours to Jisr el Mujameah; and half an hour more to the camp . . . just below Koubab el Howa. At four hours and forty minutes passed a ruin with a few short columns called Nusleh. . . . At five hours is the great Wady Osheh (or Ushey), with a large tell of the same name; and in ten minutes further, Wady Mukhûrkûsh crosses the plain on its way to the Jordan. The ruined town called es Soudah, half an hour south of this, has many columns and sarcophagi; and from that onward the remains of the great Beth-shan begin to appear, and constantly multiply for nearly an hour before you reach the castle."—*The Land and the Book*, chap. xxx.

Lab on the south ; the remains of a large theatre built of basalt, with its dens for wild beasts, and other accompaniments of the bloody pastime,—all combine to prove the strength as well as the antiquity of the place. The Tell is about two hundred feet high, and as it had a wall round the summit, the strength of Beth-shan can almost be measured. But some of the remains of elegance, as well as of strength, are there. Fragments of columns and of Corinthian capitals are now built into vulgar walls ; and there, no doubt, the bodies of Saul and his sons were fastened, after the fatal battle of Gilboa, when the men of Jabesh-gilead carried the remains to their city, there to be interred as became them. Beth-shan was a city of temples, the foundations of which can still be traced ; and altogether, it is supposed, the place must have been at least five miles in circumference. So fertile was the vicinity, and so delicious were its fruits, that the rabbis had a saying, “ If Paradise was in the land of Israel, Beth-shean was the gate of it,”—a contrast, this, to the fact that on one occasion thirteen thousand Jews were massacred there by the Gentiles who held the place.

But the desolation which presides over the ruins, and the brigand character of the handful of fellahin who cluster around them, proclaim how completely Time has prevailed. Yet the time will perhaps come when Beisan will revive, and be more than Beth-shan or Scythopolis ever was. The anticipation has been formed that it may yet become a great manufacturing centre. Its water power will then run waste no longer. The Plain of Jezreel above, the Jalud watering it, and

the Ghor of Beisan all tilled below, may become capable of “sustaining a little nation in themselves.” The former activity, and more, might then revive. These tells and ruins, marking the sites of former cities, might spring into life again. Salim, Ænon, and other places, might be disinterred. The valley might become a highway, as it was of old, between the sea-coast on the west and Bashan on the east. Succoth, and Pella in the distance, might become all that they ever were: at least one gladly grasps at the thought as one more ground of hope that this land, so long entombed, may yet have a day of resurrection. But this cannot be till these Arab spoilers be extirpated,—or better, reclaimed; though the distance of such a prospect may well sadden us at the thought of the long years of darkness and of woe which seem still to lie before the Saviour’s land. What can be expected, or at least expected soon, from a country where the strength, resources, and importance of a village or a town are gaged by the number of guns it can muster in a fight—ten, a hundred, or a thousand?

The River Jordan still continues its circumvolutions in the Ghor, earning for itself, wherever it flows, that title which the Arabs give it—Esh Sherieh el Kebir—“the great watering-place.” It curves and twists to north, south, east, and west, and in the short space of a quarter of an hour seems again to run towards every quarter of the compass. There *are* lovely scenes now, however, on its banks. The birds with their music; the flowers with their beauty and their odours; the matted jungle and abundant vegetation,—all tell the Western that he is in the East. Mountain torrents at

some places rush madly into the stream ; at others, smaller rills help to feed and swell it ; and the Jordan of reality hence becomes, at times, the Jordan of our fancy and our home dreams. Nor is the impression weakened when Lynch records : " We saw the fresh track of a tiger on the low clayey margin where he had come to drink. At another time, as we passed his lair, a wild boar started with a savage grunt and dashed into the thicket." If such things excited, however, the song of the nightingale and the bulbul soothed and gladdened, amid these solemn, solitary wilds.

Though the Ghor at many places be the very abode of silence, there are seasons when some parts of it are instinct with life. The tribes who are strong enough to make themselves feared, or to defend their own, sometimes sow great breadths along the margin of the river ; and, when the grain is ripened, the harvest scenes of other years are renewed. Leaving the grain to grow under the favouring sun, the Arabs resort for several months to their mountains ; but in due time the wheat and the barley fall before the sickle ; the gleaner gathers ; the dull ox, unmuzzled, treads out the corn ; on the rude threshing-floor it is winnowed, and then borne away to some far off encampment, the hope of the wandering tribe.

We cannot stay to register the islands and other beauties of the sacred stream. Wady Malakh or Glen Salt on the west, and Wady Ajlun on the east side of the stream, at seasons bring down their waters to swell the Jordan. But the downward path of the wayfarer often leads him into scenes so sad and solitary that the



THE SOURCE OF THE JABBOK



MOUTH OF THE ARNON

monotony wearies, and some have felt as if the whole region were somehow weighed down with a curse. The river brink is fringed with perpetual verdure: "the scent of water" does the whole. But the earth at some distance seems to be calcined: it is salt-sown, and the cry of "lamentation and woe" is almost heard by the saddened visitant. Though tributaries to the main stream occasionally join it from either side, there are portions of the Ghor which it is penance to traverse. The river is sometimes eighty yards wide and two feet deep; but the average of one day's sailing by the American Expedition gives the width at fifty-six yards, and the depth at a little more than four feet. At various places there are fords in the river, but they are only locally important, and not known to fame. In this strange land even joy must have in it a dash of grief: it would not otherwise be in keeping.

Widely different opinions are on record regarding the depth of the river at different places; but they may often be explained by considering the season of the year to which they refer. At one place Lynch saw a bush deposited in a tree fifteen feet above the Jordan at the time of his visit. It had been placed there, he said, by a recent freshet. The extent of the rise and fall in the river can thus be understood; and the fact explains the rousing of the lion by the swellings of the Jordan. The American explorers saw no traces of lions, but many of a species of tiger, and of other wild beasts, along the margin of the river.

We are now approaching the Fords of the Pilgrims; but at some distance above them there is an old Roman

bridge spanning a dry bed, which was once, no doubt, the Jordan, but only showing now how much the course is changed. Bleak desolation, however, still presides in the region, though the river is one hundred and twenty feet wide, and its margin bears the wild cane and other tropical plants. It is in this neighbourhood that the Jabbok, now the Zerka, joins the Jordan, from east-north-east, and we therefore diverge for a little from the main stream to visit

3. THE JABBOK.

This river rises in the Hauran, not far from the sources of the Jarmuk, and falls into the Jordan perhaps thirty miles below the Sea of Galilee. The water at the junction is sweet, but the stones in the vicinity are covered with a saline incrustation, indicating the influence of the Dead Sea, though twenty miles distant, in spreading a briny efflorescence all around it. When the Zerka is in flood it enters the Jordan by a double channel, which is perennial, though the upland feeders fail. It formed the northern boundary of the land of the Ammonites, and subsequently divided the inheritance of Gad from that of the half tribe of Manasseh, and is first mentioned in Scripture in Gen. xxxii. 22. It rises, we have seen, among the Hauran mountains, and after a course of about sixty-five miles, passing Kalat, Zerka, and other ruins, it loses itself in the Jordan. It thus carries the waters of Gilead and that upland region to the river. But it is of unequal size, and even of different lengths at different periods of the year, while it

is said to run, at some places, under ground. For part of its course the Zerka may traverse an arid desert, but in Gilead it flows between lofty precipices, some of which are not less than five hundred feet high.* The scenery there is wild and picturesque, and at some places it approaches the grand; for the mountains appear to have been cleft in two to the width of scarcely a hundred yards, to admit of a channel for the stream, which at such places may be about ten yards wide. Indeed, so remarkable is the region for beauty, that in traversing Bashan and Gilead one has said, "We continued our way through a country the beauty of which so surprised us that we often asked each other what were our sensations, as if to ascertain the reality of what we saw, and persuade each other, by mutual confessions of our delight, that the picture before us was not an optical delusion. The landscape alone, which varied at every turn, and gave us new beauties from every different point of view, was of itself worth all the pains of an excursion to the eastward of Jordan." Amid those neglected scenes there are beauties lurking which amply bear out all that is said in Scripture of the richness and the charms of Gilead and Bashan.

The margin of the Jabbok is fringed with oleander and plane trees, with wild olives and wild almonds, with the cyclamen and other flowers, as well as with reeds which sometimes rise to the height of fifteen feet;

* Dr. Thomson says of a similar scene elsewhere: "The descent of six hundred and ten feet to the bed of the river was more than difficult, really dangerous and frightful. One held the horse by the head, and two by the tail, to keep him from tumbling over the precipice."

so that the stream steals along heard, but not beheld, by those who have found their way—no easy task—into the ravine where it flows. Traveller after traveller speaks in terms of loudest eulogy both of the channel and the banks of the Jabbok. “Surprise,” “admiration,” “fertile soil,” “hills clothed with forests,” “magnificent landscapes,” are terms which are thus employed to describe scenes, the more impressive, no doubt, because they are utterly unexpected. “Our path opened up views which surprised and charmed us by their grandeur and beauty,” is a phrase which might be stereotyped in connection with Gilead and Bashan; while, to add the attractions of antiquity and ruins, at no great distance are the remains of Jabesh-gilead, famous in the wars of Saul, and for the fidelity of its men in rescuing his head from its ignominious exposure on the walls of Beth-shan. From the Castle of Rubad, somewhat to the north, Lebanon, the Sea of Galilee, Esdraelon, Carmel, the Great Sea, with all Judah and Ephraim, are visible; and eulogy culminates here when one exclaims, “It is the finest view that I ever saw in any part of the world.” If to all this we add the songs of the birds which frequent the thickets of Gilead, and the groves which even the sun cannot penetrate, we have a scene of Oriental richness which at some seasons at least would delight not merely an Eastern eye, but even those which are accustomed to the copious rivers of far moister climates. Wood pigeons, partridges, and other birds, abound near this stream; and even though we make some deductions on account of the excited fancy of travellers, enough remains to show that

the Jabbok is not unworthy of the "delightful land" itself.

These banks, however, are for the most part deserted now: wild beasts and birds are its chief permanent inhabitants; though it was not always so. We might speak, for example, of Peniel (Gen. xxxii. 30), where the Gadites built a city; of Penuel, which Gideon destroyed (Judges viii. 8-17), and which Jeroboam rebuilt (1 Kings xii. 25). Or we might instance Ramoth-gilead, where Jehoram, king of Judah, was dangerously wounded; where Jehu was made king of Israel (2 Kings ix. 1-13); and where Ahab was slain in battle by the Syrians (2 Chron. xviii. 33, 34). Among the defiles around the sources of the Jabbok, in the higher uplands of Gilead, stood also Rabbath-ammon, famed in prophecy and in the history of the Jews, on the banks of a tributary to the Jabbok; but all is ruin now. Prophecy is fulfilled in Rabbah as elsewhere, but let it suffice to point, as an example, to Bozrah, in this region, once a queen among cities, but now a scene of sad and inexpressible desolation. Once famous for its vineyards, scarcely a tree can now be seen in its vicinity. Once the market-place of Syria, of Irak, and the Hedjaz, it is now the abode of "a mere handful, almost lost in the maze of its ruins." It was the oath of Jehovah—"I have sworn by myself that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all the cities thereof shall be perpetual wastes" (Jer. xlix. 13). Such was the prediction, and what of the fulfilment? Lord Lindsay replies, "Bozrah is now for the most part a heap of ruins, a most dreary spectacle. Here

and there the direction of a street or alley is discernible, but that is all." Neither Roman, nor Christian, nor Saracen, nor Turk could turn aside the purposes of the Supreme.

While wandering among these wild regions, it is not uncommon to stumble upon an Arab encampment, or a whole tribe in motion ; and in the distance, at least, the scene is captivating. The sheikh rides at the head of his clansmen, while men and women walk after him as best they may. The boys drive the sheep and the goats, the children sometimes tend the lambs, and poultry are carried in panniers upon camels. The tents, and all that is connected with them, are conveyed in the same way ; and as their progress is tardy, for the animals browse as they go, the whole procession is funereally slow. Moving, however, amid the green uplands and woody slopes, a visitor from the West recognises what is both novel and gratifying, at a distance from the abominations of the people ; though the romance is dashed when we add that a Gipsy encampment in our own land is a miniature of that of the Arabs in Gilead, or around the sources of the Jabbok.

It was on the banks of that river that Jacob, when returning from Mesopotamia, met Esau, after a long separation, following the fraudulent obtaining of the paternal blessing. Near a ford in the brook their interview took place ; and in the same neighbourhood did the patriarch wrestle with a mightier than his brother — the Angel of the Covenant : so that amid these scenes, no unmeet type of the rivers of Palestine, rolling now through dreary sterility, now through orientally luxu-

riant verdure, now through what is monotonous and tame, now through the rugged and the savage, that wondrous wrestling took place (Gen. xxxii. 22-30).

It was wondrous. Are we in quest of spiritual as well as material beauty amid such scenes? It is found in abundance here. Somewhere on the banks of this Jabbok, Jacob took his prudent precautions to avert his brother's displeasure, and then retired, perhaps into some recess on the brink, to pour out his heart before his God. Strange mixture of good and evil was that man of prayer! Never had any saint of God a grander oratory than he! Never a more direct or undisturbed pathway straight up to the throne! And what a prayer! Jacob on the margin of the Jabbok, and the contrite, troubled sinner now, urge the same plea and make the same confession—"I am not worthy of the least of all thy mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant. . . . But *thou saidst*, I will surely do thee good." Enough for the wayfarer that God has promised: that gives the suppliant hope, even while contrition lays him in the dust. "In his word do I hope."

And that prayer prevailed. The Angel of the Covenant was there. The patriarch pled and wrestled. His cry was, "Except thou bless me, I will not let thee go;" and he was blessed. Jacob became Israel,—that is, "a prince of God; for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. xxxii. 28).

And when was it otherwise? It is written, "Ask, and ye shall receive." Now, who ever obeyed the com-

mand yet found the promise fail? We read, "Seek, and ye shall find;" and does not the scene on the banks of the Jabbok at once re-echo and enforce the assurance? That river carries to the Jordan, as we have seen, the waters from the dark ravines on the northern slopes of Mount Gilead,—but the doings transacted on its margin have carried much further the gladdening assurance that God is the hearer and the answerer of prayer. He gives peace, and who can occasion trouble? Esau shall greet Jacob with a brother's welcome when Jehovah gives the command.

But Jacob was not merely a man of prayer: he was also a man of action; and before meeting his brother, as we have seen, he had so arranged his march as to make it one of safety. And similar arrangements may still be witnessed in the same region as those which were made by Jacob (Gen. xxxii. 13-23). When an Arab encampment breaks up, the flocks and herds are still placed in divisions, with an open space between each kind. The camels and asses loaded with the camp equipments follow. The camp followers, in the shape of dogs and other attendants, constitute other detachments; and the procession is closed or headed, as preference leads, by the chief of the tribe. The space between each family in the march may be a hundred yards or more, and such is the regularity, that the camels, the asses, the sheep, the goats, and the dogs, never become intermingled. To-day, in short, as well as in Jacob's time, or between three thousand and four thousand years ago, "a space is put betwixt drove and drove."

We have seen that there are spots along the margin

of this stream signalized by great beauty—recesses where the leopard makes his lair or the wild boar ravens—and upland, park-like glades, where gentle gazelles feed and birds in thousands sing. At other places, however, the district is characterized by more than common sterility, and such things have deepened the wonder of visitors to those scenes. Men may decay, or cities may be laid in ruins; habits may change, or one people may be supplanted by another, but how does it happen that a dreary barrenness has taken the place of proverbial fertility? What is it that has furnished so melancholy a reply to the question, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” It seems as if changes so radical and so lasting could be ascribed with truth only to the ultimate Cause, or that right hand which is omnipotent. The country was originally a place for cattle (Num. xxxii. 1); and it was yet more remarkable for its balm and richly aromatic productions. From the report of travellers, we may infer that the original peculiarity of the region might be restored. The orange and lemon, which still enrich and adorn other portions of the land, might be reproduced here. Indeed fruits, all but numberless, might abound, as of old;—grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, apples, almonds, oranges, lemons, citrons, pears, peaches, apricots, plums, quinces, bananas, prickly pears, and many more, might appear again. But meanwhile this region is a desolate waste, a territory in ruins, where there is much to proclaim that the country is in some places peeled and bare, just in terms of the warnings of Him who sees the end from the beginning. Astronomy tells of

the terrible desolation that would sweep over our globe were the inclination of the earth's axis to be altered even in a slight degree, and the traveller in Palestine is sometimes tempted to think that that catastrophe has happened there.

Reference has been made to the gazelle, as found near the Jabbok; and that graceful favourite deserves a notice in its native home. The scriptural allusions to these bounding, buoyant creatures, are numerous, and as appropriate as numerous. They leap, or skip, in a peculiar manner; and Solomon says, "My love is like a roe, or a young hart; behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills;"—as often in the glades which fringe the Jabbok. Gazelles are timid, shrinking creatures; and the wise, foolish king, says again, that they feed among the lilies till the day-break, after which they retire into shady places. And so in various parts of Scripture. Now, all over the East, the gazelle is still an object of interest; and, whether it be pursued by the huntsman and the hawker, or admired and sung by the poet, it seems always to impart pleasure to the onlooker. Its grace, its ease, and fearless security, like the chamois among still loftier precipices, are admired by many. The tenderness of the dam to her young furnishes Jeremiah with one figure (Jer. xiv. 5); the loving nature of gazelles furnishes Solomon with another (Prov. v. 19.) Again and again does David—whose eye for natural beauty was quick—refer to the habits of this gentle creature (Ps. xlii. 1, 2; 2 Sam. xxii. 34), and altogether it forms one of the most pleasing objects to be met with in

these wild uplands. It gives interest to what might else be tame, and living beauty to what might else, at some points, appear a region of death.

The mode of hunting the gazelle, in some parts of Syria, is sufficiently cruel. We know that, in former times at least, the lion made his lair by the Jordan. The leopard is sometimes seen in the recesses of Lebanon, or among the wild gorges of the Leontes. The American explorers thought they saw traces of a tiger at one place, though more probably it was a leopard. It is not very common to hunt such noble quarry, but the gazelle is deemed a fit object for man to prey upon ; and on the eastern frontiers of Syria there are several places, called *mussiade*, set apart for that purpose. An open place in a plain, about a mile and a half square, is enclosed on three sides by a wall so high that the antelope (the gazelle) cannot leap over it ; but decoy openings in the wall are left at different places, and near each gap a deep ditch is dug outside. The ground thus prepared is always near some brook or fountain, to which the parched animal, according to David's words (Ps. xlii.), resorts to quench its thirst. When the herd comes to drink, peasants, who lurk near for the purpose, scare the gazelles into the enclosure prepared as a trap, and from which they soon attempt to escape. That, however, they can do only at the openings already mentioned ; and there they tumble into the ditch in such numbers that they are sometimes captured by hundreds. The monarch of the herd always leads the way—that is, he is the first to take the fatal leap ; the rest instinctively follow, and death is the

result. The flesh is prepared for food, and the skin is manufactured into a coarse kind of vellum.

From the junction of the Jabbok the Jordan descends through wild and dangerous rapids. There are, or were, baths in a wady in this vicinity; and Lynch saw a small stream entering the river, of which the water was sweet and clear, with a temperature of 76 degrees. There is a rapid fall here, in the bed of the stream; and further up there is a fall about eleven feet high; and below it, two tumultuous rapids, each about one hundred and fifty yards in length; and the result is great peril to him who tries to sail there. But we are now approaching one of the most interesting spots in the whole course of the Jordan, and we may well linger for a time to glance at the associations, ancient and more modern, truthful and superstitious, which are linked to the place.

4. THE FORDS OF THE JORDAN.

Various places are referred to in Scripture under this or synonymous titles; and modern travellers, as we have already seen, have forded the river at different points. Buckingham found it barely fordable about three miles below the Sea of Galilee; and there is a passage somewhat further down where the waters are shallower still. A little below Beisan, Captain Mangles found the stream reaching as high as to touch his saddle girth, in the month of March; and further down Burckhardt found it to be nearly of the same



FORDS OF THE JORDAN.



ENTRANCE OF THE JORDAN INTO THE DEAD SEA.

depth in the midst of summer. In regard to such a stream, however, the season of the year must necessarily affect the depth.*

But "the Fords of the Jordan" have a peculiarity of meaning. The spot where the Hebrews crossed the river, nearly opposite to Jericho, to enter on possession of the long-promised land, is necessarily one of special interest; and the scene, as depicted by inspiration, can never fail to have charms for a believer. Over against Succoth, near the entrance of the Jabbok, there is one practicable ford, at what is called "Bethabara"—"the place of the passage;" at least some writers would place it there. There Gideon lay in wait for the Midianites (Judges vii. 24); and there the Gileadites slew the Ephraimites (Judges xii. 6). In this neighbourhood—between Succoth and Zarthan—Solomon had his brass foundries. But the prime interest of the vicinity gathers round the passage of Joshua, the son of Nun. It was there and then that the hosts of Israel passed over this Jordan; there and then that the waters receded before the ark, at the touch of the feet of those who bore it, like the Red Sea at the waving of the wand of Moses; there and then that the monumental stones from the Jordan were set up at Gilgal; and there and then the mightiest military occupation began of which we have any authentic or detailed accounts (Josh. iii. 5). Once more: Elijah in this region clove the Jordan with his mantle, and here

* "It seems that there are now many hundreds of places where a passage (across the Jordan) can be made over the rocks in the channel, without wetting the feet."—*Stanley*.

did David pass the river again and again. Routed armies fled apace by some similar passage. But it is not our purpose to speculate regarding these points, and where certainty cannot be reached, we rather pass on.

The place where the Saviour was baptized by his forerunner, of course became an object of deep interest to many in early times. The real site is unknown; but that has not hindered—it has rather helped—superstition to fix upon more than one. The Latin Church has selected its spot, and the Greek Church its; and the rivals contend at times with an ardour worthy of a better cause for the pre-eminence of their favourite ford. Each of them presents some of the most exquisite beauties of the river. The banks are fringed with tamarisks, willows, oleanders, and many luxuriant shrubs; and had not superstition blotted the beauty, it would have been one of the fairest regions of the East. *There*, to the south-east, are the mountains of Moab,—Mount Nebo and Pisgah *somewhere* among them. Yonder, a little to the north-west, are the ruins of Jericho, as far as they can be ascertained; while between, the river rolls broad and deep and tranquil, as if calmed by the memories of the past, though the precise scene of the passage and the baptism must be left to conjecture or tradition.

Allusion has already been made to the victory of Gideon with three hundred chosen men. The iniquities of Israel had brought misery and bondage upon them. Their enemies had invaded their borders: famine followed in the wake of invasion, and the miser-

able inhabitants were compelled to flee to dens and caves of the earth. But a deliverer appeared in the person of Gideon, who resolutely assailed the Amalekites, the Midianites, and other invaders of his country. His army of two and thirty thousand men was reduced to three hundred, by divine directions, "lest Israel should vaunt themselves against Jehovah, and say, Mine own hand hath saved me." The spring or well of Harod, (that is, "trembling,") near which the Israelites were encamped, was used to test the courage of the warriors; and inspiration tells the result (Judges vii. 1-8). With his handful of men, then, Gideon acted against the Midianites, who "lay in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude;" and by a simple stratagem, namely, the sound of trumpets at night, the breaking of pitchers in which a light was carried by each man, and the sudden flashing of these lights in the face of the enemy, their swarming hosts were first startled, then routed, and one hundred and twenty thousand of the invaders fell. The Fords of the Jordan near Jericho were seized by the men of Ephraim, who "took the waters unto Beth-barah and Jordan;" and aided by the men of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, the victory of Gideon was complete. The battle had been fought at some distance to the north-west, in the Valley of Jezreel, and the conqueror passed the river "faint, yet pursuing" (Judges viii. 4),—setting an example to believers in every age never to desist from the pursuit and assault of spiritual foes, however feeble or dejected the pursuer may feel. The God who fought that day for the chosen people is still the friend—may we not say the

ally?—of all who place their trust in Him; and on the battle-field against the Midianites by the Fords of the Jordan, as well as at a thousand other places, He says, “The Lord keepeth that man in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on him, because he trusteth in him.” He encourages us to “trust in the Lord, and not be afraid.” The successive victories of Gideon that day, and the utter overthrow of the confederated hordes, amply attest that truth.

As we wander among these tranquil scenes,—tranquil at least when man is absent,—we can scarcely help recollecting how often the serenity of nature has been disturbed by the lawless outbreaks of man. Here the river has often run red with blood, and been impeded by heaps of the slain. Here the Gileadite slew the Ephraimite, and the Ephraimite the Gileadite, till the dead were counted by tens of thousands. On these banks, and near these fords, the mode of uttering a single letter of the Hebrew alphabet—Sibboleth instead of Shibboleth—has been the occasion of death to multitudes. In spite of miracles the most amazing, and mercies embodying the affluence of Heaven, man continued man, self-willed, untamed, ungodly. Were it true that any scenes of beauty in nature, or any mercies in providence, could win men’s hearts to love their God, his mercies imparted along the stream of the Jordan might have produced that effect. But it is not mercies in providence, it is not a beauteous landscape—it is omnipotent grace alone that can make man like his God again; and till that power be put forth, all is as deceptive as the mirage of the desert, as transient as a writing upon

sand. It forms one sure proof that the Bible is from God, that nothing but its truth received into the heart, enshrined there, and obeyed in the life, can either lift up the degraded or purify the polluted.

These fords have long furnished an arena on which the different sections of false worship, represented by the Greek and Romish Churches, have contended for their superstitions. They have each selected a ford,—the Greeks about four miles above the Dead Sea, and the Latins perhaps three miles further up; and each party insists that its choice represents the very place in the river where Joshua and his myriads crossed, where Jesus was baptized, and where other scriptural events occurred. But, passing by such debates, we may advert to the wild carnival that is annually held there by the pilgrims who flock from all quarters of the world to bathe in the sacred stream, to wash away their sins, and make sure of heaven by an act of superstition. The Greek ford is reputed the favourite, and is a scene of singular beauty. The vegetation is tropically luxuriant. The banks are lined with thickets where the bulbul is heard among the foliage, and where reeds, wild vines, and other climbing plants, are so intertwined that they cause the day to counterfeit the night. The river is there somewhat rapid, and the whole scene, guarded by the adjacent mountains, most of them far more than classical, forms a panorama such as cannot be often matched outside “the Lands of the Bible.”

As many as three thousand pilgrims, with two thousand other visitors, have been seen assembled at the same time at these fords, all mad upon delusion or

frolic, and all swelling the wild uproar. They commonly assemble on the eve of the festival day, in the neighbourhood of Jericho, and representatives of the superstitions of all lands are there. Towards morning their tents are struck, if they have any, and amid the flashing of flambeaus, and the cries of half-maddened pilgrims, they move towards the ford, that they may reach the spot about sunrise. Oriental costumes of every hue, and tongues of every intonation; travellers on foot and travellers on horseback; wayfarers with camels, and humbler men on asses; soldiers and civilians; the greasy Russian and the lithe Greek; the chattering Oriental and the stately Roman; the sober Briton and the impulsive American—men, women, and children, all join in the cavalcade and swell the motley procession. They are preceded by torchbearers, and escorted by Arab horsemen. The Greek archbishop and the Turkish governor of the district are also there, for the sake of order and peace. Thus led on, the crowds press forward to wash in a stream which they idly suppose possesses virtue to cleanse them from something more than the pollution of the flesh. Amid the wild excitement of such a scene, where men substitute a mere ceremony for the Saviour, many accidents every year occur. Several of the deluded pilgrims are generally left dead on the spot, and some visitors are careful to tell us that nothing is more remarkable among the devotees than the absence of sympathy with the feeble and the suffering. A shout of laughter sometimes responds to the groans of the wounded; and it is made painfully plain that superstition has there accom-

plished its usual effects. He that is false to God cannot be really true to man: the heart is hardened, and made "hateful and hating," as inspiration describes some to be.

Having reached the margin of the Jordan, the pilgrims often rush wildly into the stream. The young and the old,—some spontaneously, others with reluctance,—some with shoutings of joy, others with sobs of alarm,—dip three times in the precious river. Priests are there, ready to sprinkle the more sober, who make the ceremony a religious one. Some of the pilgrims carry with them the cloth which is to form their winding-sheet, under the ignorant belief that when swathed in stuff hallowed by immersion in the Jordan, the soul and the body are equally safe. Others carry away branches or other things which have been dipped in Jordan, as memorials of the day. Upon the whole, the scene at the fords near Jericho ranks among the most humbling of all that superstition has substituted for the truth of God. Some describe that scene as an outrage against modesty; and it requires only the glance of a child to see that man returns from such fantastic tricks against high Heaven more degraded and more dark-souled than before. To resort to the River Jordan, instead of fleeing to the Fountain opened for sin, is one of the saddest delusions which can haunt the soul of man; and, amid such scenes, one ceases to wonder that the proud Turk spurns the faith which thus degrades the men called Christians, or that the rulers of the land bastinado the pilgrims on the very way to the sacred stream.

It may be well to present the bathing scene at the fords as it was seen and described by one from the Western World, and who looked with a tolerant eye upon the sight. Lynch's encampment narrowly escaped being swept away by the bathers as they rushed to the stream, and he says: "In all the wild haste of a disorderly rout, Copts and Russians, Poles, Armenians, Greeks and Syrians—men from all parts of Asia, from Europe, from Africa, and from far-distant America—on they came; men, women, and children, of every age and hue, and in every variety of costume, talking, screaming, shouting, in almost every known language under the sun. Mounted as variably as those who had preceded them (an advance guard), many of the women and children were suspended in baskets, or confined in cages; and with their eyes strained to the river, heedless of all intervening obstacles, they hurried eagerly forward, and dismounting in haste, and disrobing with precipitation, rushed down the bank, and threw themselves into the stream. They seemed to be absorbed by one impulsive feeling, and perfectly regardless of the observation of others."—Thus acted about eight thousand immortal beings; and that is the thing now called religion in the land where the Son of God once lived, taught, endured, and died, to show the more excellent way.*

Reclining on the green and tangled bank of the Jordan here, it requires no effort to recall the glories of the former ages. It was not far from this that the most singular of all recorded invasions took place. It was

* For a more measured and more favourable account, see Stanley's "Sinai and Palestine," chap. vii.

here that the true God made himself known as about to sweep away both the Canaanites and their gods. The question which was propounded for an answer on these banks was this, Shall the knowledge of Jehovah perish from the earth ; or shall he assert his high prerogatives and teach the nations to be still and know that he is God ? We know how that question was settled ; and yet, in the view of the superstitious hordes who annually haunt the fords, or of the bandit tribes who prowl and plunder all around, one feels that another demonstration is needed to show that the true God ruleth and judgeth in the earth.

But in considering the Fords of the Jordan, or those passages which are best known by that name, we have been carried somewhat past

5. THE PLAINS OF JERICHO.

Before reaching these celebrated plains, the Jordan has grown to its greatest magnitude. It winds in many a link in this vicinity, as if still reluctant to be lost in such a receptacle as awaits it in the Dead Sea. Much of the plain is now sterile and desolate, but near the stream the vegetation, in many places, shows how fertile the region may have been, or may yet become, when the hand of power shall protect and not oppress the efforts of industry.

It is not needful to say again that the river here glides among scenes which are associated with man's portion for ever. Mount Gilead and the Plains of Moab are away on the east ; the Hills of Jericho bound the

western view ; and scene after scene reminds us both of the early and the later doings of the Hebrew people. Their wars with Moab,—their miraculous passage of the river,—the associations which are linked with Jericho itself, where God so signally wrought—in short, a hundred events from Moses to the Saviour, have happened on these plains, every one of them affecting the destinies of our race ; every one of them constituting an important step in the history of our world ; and every one of them blended with the history of that people who have been at once the most influential and the most despised, the most sinning and yet the most signally defended of all the nations. It was near this that, after eight and thirty years of wilderness wandering, the Jews began to see their hope deferred turned into fruition ; and where the river, in flood from the melting of the snows of Hermon and Lebanon in spring, at once gave way before the presence of its God. It was a marvellous scene. Who can ever depict it ? Standing on the margin of the stream, faith may there make a near approach to seeing Him who is invisible : the safe passage granted to the weary yet exulting tribes tells for ever that God was their Rock, and the Most High their Redeemer.

It was a marvellous exodus that led those tribes to the Red Sea ; and now it is as marvellous an immigration that introduces them to Canaan. Enemies might be hovering around them, ready to sweep down and discomfit ; a broad and rapid stream might appear to bar their entrance, swollen as it always is in April and May ;—all might seem to thwart the promise. But the

set time had arrived. Greater was He that was for the Hebrews than all that could be against them ; and their mighty host passed in safety into the land of promise, now become the land of possession. We do not define this miracle as to its extent ; nor is there any need that we should. Enough to know that God was working there. The nations had forgotten him, and multiplied idols like sins : but to prevent the great I AM from becoming utterly unknown in his own world, miracle after miracle was wrought ; nay, for a time one of the nations of the earth enjoyed a miraculous existence, and the marvel which took place at the crossing of the Jordan formed a grand inauguration of the worship of Jehovah, which was about to be set up in a land which swarmed with idols. It at once poured contempt on the gods of the blinded nations, and assured the children of Israel that the Lord their God was among them of a truth. Wondrous was the sight, when, about the same spot, the Spirit of the Lord descended on the Saviour as a dove ; but not less wonderful the interposition which carried millions through the flood upon dry land.

One other scriptural incident connected with the plains may be mentioned here. Eglon, king of Moab, in alliance with Ammon and Amalek, took Jericho, and, supported by ten thousand Moabites, kept Israel in subjection for eighteen years. But Ehud, a "left-handed Benjamite," at length smote the oppressor, and the deliverer's trumpet, heard on Mount Ephraim, roused the men of Israel boldly to emancipate their country and sweep its foreign occupants away. Seizing upon the fords, after the rout had commenced, the children

of Israel at once prevented the intruders from escaping and Moab from sending assistance across the Jordan. The result was decisive: "Israel slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man. . . . And the land had rest four score years" (Judges iii. 29, 30).

The fertility of these plains has been described by many in language of unmeasured eulogy. One person speaks of their former condition as resembling a garden two hundred thousand acres in extent, and famous for its woods, especially its palm trees, and opobalsams. Josephus speaks in similar strains, and tells of the balsam, which was the most precious of all the fruits of the place. The air, also, is described as being so genial that the inhabitants needed only garments of linen; it seemed, in truth, the garden of the Lord. But these and the other glories of the place have all passed away, and one solitary palm tree (which some declare they could not discover,) is the sole relic that remains where forests of that tree grew eighteen centuries ago, around "the City of Palm Trees," as Jericho was called. Thickets of thorns, and a sorry hamlet of Bedawin, named Riha, for Jericho, form nearly all that survives to represent a region once teeming with life, fertility, and beauty. The land mourns for the iniquity of them that dwelt thereon, and all is now dreary, desolate, and mute. How deep the contrast between the present state of things and the day when some portions of the goodly land produced an hundred-fold!*

* Dr. Thomson, however, speaks of places where the return to the husbandman is four hundred-fold;—nay, in one case, he says, "The yield

Yet its very silence is eloquent. It tells that the Holy One is true to every word he has recorded; and no reflecting traveller can traverse the plains without perceiving that they are now blighted and seared in fulfilment of the assurance, "They that are far off from God shall perish." They eloquently proclaim that—

"They who scorn the noonday beam, perverse,
Shall find the blessing, misimproved, a curse."

All around there are tokens that Jehovah has been there. Yonder are the fords. Gilgal cannot be very distant. These mounds cover the spot where Jericho once stood,—the city of Rahab and the spies, of Joshua and his warriors, of curious Zaccheus and of blind Bartimeus. Here is the Fountain of the Sultan, transparent, copious, sweet, cool, and swarming with fish;—unquestionably that whose waters Elisha sweetened (2 Kings ii. 19-22), and whose ample stream, gladdened by the song of the nightingale, and fringed by tropical verdure, might teach the wretched Bedawin how to make their plains fertile once more. Away to the west, but among the hills, is Ai, the scene of retributive justice upon Achan. Yon gorge, the opening of the Wady Kelt, is believed by some to contain the Brook Cherith, the hiding-place of Elijah, where the Lord of all displayed his power, and manifested his presence with his servant in very wondrous ways. Sea and land, beast and bird, fountain and river, shall all offer homage to God when he calls; and a visit to the site of Jericho amply

was more than a thousand-fold."—*The Land and the Book*, chap. vii. We have already seen that he reckons the Huleh, from Tell el Kady downwards, the richest grain field that he knows in any country.

attests that fact by the events of which that place was the centre. But Jericho became again a scene of dark pollution. Antony and Cleopatra revelled there. Herod built and butchered there. And there, on the other hand, the Lord of life, unheeded by thousands, wrought works of wonder. But all have passed away, and the sterility of the scene appears to proclaim aloud that there is a God that judgeth in the earth. All is given up to be baked into brick, or reduced to dust, rejoiced in only by the lizard. In vain would Zaccheus, were he to return to his former home, search for a sycamore tree to climb. In other parts of the country it abounds. It is said to bear seven crops of a poor kind of fig each year (Amos vii. 14); and with its ample stem, its wide-spread branches, and its roots, themselves stouter than many a tree (Luke xvii. 6), it helps to beautify the landscape. But, like many other things, it has disappeared from the neighbourhood of Jericho. In some places, water-courses, choked up, only produce matted jungle or fetid exhalations, in a country where every drop of water is precious. In other places drought parches, vegetation dies, though the district, lying in a basin thirteen hundred feet below the level of the sea, and surrounded by hills, is tropical; and the land once flowing with milk and honey vies in barrenness with the wilderness itself. No roads deserving of the name exist. In short, the desolation is at some points intense; while barren rocks and dusty plains render the vicinity, at some seasons, the very focus of discomfort. "For leagues together," one has written, "the eye looks in vain for a tree, or a

human dwelling, or a trace of cultivation; and it is absolutely a relief when night falls down, and the dark shadows of its blighted hills conceal the nakedness of its surface." For contrast we may think of the time when Solomon could sing, "The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell." Loveliness and fecundity then;—dreariness worse than the grave-yard now! Such, we repeat again and again, such is the land which once flowed with milk and honey. Such are the wages of sin. Such is a beacon, of national dimensions, and burning for long, dreary centuries, to warn us of the danger of having other gods before the true One.

But we have only glanced at the presiding sterility here. "I am compelled to acknowledge," Maundrell wrote, "that melancholy as are the vast solitudes of Arabia Petræa, which I traversed in my journey from Egypt to Sinai, they are altogether pleasant compared with this." Tradition has placed among the hills to the west of the plains that "exceeding high mountain" where the Saviour had to encounter one form of temptation, on the way to be made perfect through sufferings. After he had been baptized in the Jordan, that mysterious Sufferer was carried to *some* wilderness; and, without attaching more credit to tradition than it may fairly claim, it is not improbable that this was the scene.* At least, it is just such a spot—so sterile, so

* Stanley prefers the mountains on the east side, as the scene of the Temptation.

rocky, and so wild—as would make it no common gift to be able to turn stones into bread. The caves of monks, and of even more equivocal characters, namely, the brigands of the region, are visible at many points in the mountain, which is so unsafe as to be but seldom ascended; and altogether one is not indisposed to yield to the conviction that this is the place which Matthew describes, (chap. iv.) In the presence of that fact, all minor considerations fade away into dimness. The Valley of Achor, near Ai, has not been discovered; but what though it were, compared with the interest that attaches to the place where the Tempter tried to do with the second Adam what he had fatally done with the first? The Brook Cherith is not absolutely identified,—only “probably the Wady Kelt;” but what although we were sure of it? Even the mighty interests which attach to it become small, compared with that struggle on behalf of the numberless multitude which Jesus here maintained. The ruins of the chapel on the summit, and other results of superstition, may interfere with the scriptural simplicity and the majestic associations of the place, but this *would* be a solemnizing scene, were we sure that our Substitute on the cross was “an hungered” here. And in the same connection, the visitor to such scenes may mark with interest the nabk, a species of thorn, which is believed, and with reason, to have been the tree or shrub from which the Redeemer’s crown of ignominy and of anguish was made. Its long, lithe branches, and its strong, sharp prickles, render it perfectly adapted for such a purpose. And thus the wild sterility of the place; the rude

mountain of the Quarantania; the nabk, and also the asher, or osher, now believed to be the tree which yields the apples of Sodom, and which abounds in this region—all help to carry us back to scriptural times, and render truth after truth more vividly present to the mind.

It is obvious, from the nature of the plains, that their fertility could without difficulty be restored. The Wady Kelt and its waters, where there are still the remains of aqueducts, might irrigate the whole. The Fountain of Elisha (Ain es Sultan), the Wady Duk, and other sources, might diffuse abundance once more. Indeed, the rapid fall in the river seems suggestive of irrigation; and were that duly employed, competent judges allege that the Valley of the Jordan alone could maintain five hundred thousand inhabitants. Cotton, sugar, rice, indigo, and most of the tropical productions, might flourish there. Add to these the palms and balsam trees of other days, and Jericho is restored. It will be so, when the Bible is free and open in Syria.

Perhaps the best spot from which to view the Plains of the Jordan or Jericho is the centre of the river, where the Ghor, or line of the stream, and the country on either side, can be seen in their full expanse. Those who have sailed down the Jordan have told us in very glowing terms of the peculiarities of the plains. The river curves and twists to the north, the south, the east, and the west, as if to “prolong its luxuriant meanderings in the calm and silent valley.” Here and there spots of singular beauty are still seen on the banks. Numerous birds sing with a music strange and

manifold; and both the flora and the fauna of the place at once deepen the impressions and sadden the soul. Nature, though it costs a struggle, still appears sometimes in loveliness; and of the stream some have sung,—

“ Oh, sparkling clear thy waters glow,
And murmur as they glide,
To the fair trees which bend so low,
To kiss thy loving tide ; ”

yet from the whole the glory has departed, and a transformation from sunny fertility to dreary barrenness is presented, for which only the Bible can account. How else can we explain the contrast between the present state of this region and the time when it had a palm forest eight miles long and three miles broad?

In this glance over these plains, we have referred to Wady Kelt, a gorge which is compared by some to the grandest of the Alpine passes, as probably that which contains the Brook Cherith. It is wild and stern in its features, and a fit retreat for such a prophet as Elijah. There are objections to the identification, but they seem to be weak, and one gladly regards this wild gorge as once the hiding-place of one who ranks among the greatest of the children of men. At the same time, if wildness be a means of identification, the claims of at least one other glen are strong, namely, the Wady Fasaël. It is a wild and rocky gorge, where at times all vegetation perishes, except what is found immediately on the margin of the brook. For a few miles it steals along, imparting a strip of vivid beauty, while all around is burned up, as if it had been cast

into an oven. There are many natural caves in the rocks which wall in the glen; and it cannot be denied that everything in the gorge might be made to comport with the inspired account of Elijah's wild retreat. Where the glen opens upon the plains, a small Tell or mound appears, which some believe to be the remains of the Acropolis of Jericho, named by Herod after his son Phasaelus, and in its turn giving the modern title to Wady Fasaël.

A passing reference to the death of Moses on the summit of Pisgah, or to the view which he had before he died, is scarcely enough for so prominent an event. It is difficult or impossible now to fix upon the precise spot where the great lawgiver stood, on Nebo or Pisgah; but as a whole, no locality is better ascertained. From *some spot* "over against Jericho," along the ridge which looks down upon the Plains of Moab, Moses took his last look, not merely of the Promised Land, but of this earth. Along the eastern side of the Jordan his eye would pass up to the high lands of Gilead and Bashan, till his view was shut in by the distant northern heights. Passing westward, the dying man with undimmed eye would see at least some of the mountains of Naphtali, sinking into the lower midland heights where Samaria afterwards stood. Thence he would range along the high ground, the water-shed between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, till his eye rested upon Judah and its surroundings, where, it is possible, visions of the future of his tribes, then resting in the plains below, not far from the Dead Sea, might be granted to him. That glance was to him in place of

actual possession : but it was one which fulfilled many a past promise or prediction ; and when Moses lay down to die, it might in some degree be with the feelings of him who said, " Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

After passing Jericho, the windings of the Jordan appear rather to increase. A short distance from the Dead Sea accurate observation reports that it is forty yards wide, and twelve feet deep ; lower down, it is fifty yards wide, and eleven feet deep ; still nearer the sea it is eighty yards wide, and seven feet deep ; and where it enters, it is about a hundred yards wide, but only three feet in depth.

It is thus that we have tried to follow the Jordan from its first appearance to its last. It is lost in perhaps the most mysterious abyss of all that are known to man, insomuch that the course of the Jordan has often supplied a type of our mortal career. " The young Jordan," one earnestly exclaims, " type of this strange life of ours ! Bright and beautiful in its cradle, laughing its merry morning away through the flowery fields of the Huleh ; plunging with the recklessness of youth into the tangled brakes and muddy marshes of Merom ; hurrying thence, full grown, like earnest manhood with its noisy and bustling activities, it subsides at length into life's sober mid-day, in the placid Lake of Gennesaret. When it goes forth again, it is down the inevitable proclivity of age, sinking deeper and deeper, in spite of doublings and windings innumerable, until finally lost in the bitter Sea of Death, that melancholy bourne from which there is neither escape nor return."



THE DEAD SEA FROM THE NORTH.



THE PILLAR OF USDUM.

Yet he who moralized in these words on the margin of the Jordan, wisely continued his moralizing further, for he said: "But surely the Jordan can teach other and happier lessons than these. It speaks to me and to all mankind of forgiveness of sin, of regeneration by the Spirit of God, and of a resurrection to everlasting bliss. Must this dear type of life and immortality be swallowed up for ever in the Dead Sea? Far from it. This is but the Jordan's highway to heaven. Purified from every gross and earthly alloy, it is called back to the skies by the all-attractive sun; emblem of that other resurrection when Christ shall come in the clouds, and all the holy angels with him. May we be thus drawn from earth to heaven by the mighty attraction of that glorious Sun of Righteousness."*

To complete our survey of the Jordan Valley, we have now only to glance at that mysterious deep—the Dead Sea, the Lake Asphaltites, the Sea of Usdum, or the Bâhr Lut.

* "The Land and the Book," chap. xviii.





VII.

THE DEAD SEA.

THE Valley of the Jordan, or the Ghor, is only about sixty miles in length, by an average of scarcely six or seven in breadth. The river, in its ordinary channel, is enclosed by one set of banks; but at a little distance from these, and higher, are second banks, and at some places even third lines may be traced, as if the river had in different ages run at different levels. But though the length of the river geographically be only about sixty miles, its windings raise it to perhaps two hundred. Twenty-seven dangerous rapids and many smaller descents are counted in its course; and the navigation—as was proved by the American explorers in the year 1848—is attended with no common danger. One cascade, near the confluence of the Jermuk with the Jordan, is eleven feet high. The average depth of the river is computed to be about nine feet.

Before the Jordan reaches the Dead Sea, the Ghor, as we have seen, opens up into the Plains of Jericho on the west, and those of Moab on the east. As it approaches the gloomy, briny reservoir, a luxuriant vegetation affords ample shelter for many wild animals; and though the lion has now disappeared, some other

beasts of prey are so commonly dislodged from their hiding-places by the periodical inundations, that we can understand the full force of the scriptural allusion already mentioned: "Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the swellings of Jordan" (Jer. xlix. 19). But the traveller, parched and weary, is often prompted or provoked to ask, "Where now are the honey, the opobalsam, and the teeming abundance of these plains? The region was called the Divine; it is now the blighted, like a place that has been sown with salt. Here, at least, 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain.'"

Though the fabulous accounts which were formerly current regarding the Dead Sea be now corrected or exploded, there is still enough to solemnize even a vivacious mind along these sterile shores. The very fact that the waters have no outlet seems of itself a kind of mystery. Indeed, it is a mysterious, melancholy caldron of bitumen, and brimstone, and brine. Neither rain nor fountain, not even the floods of the Jordan, tend at all to sweeten those bitter waters. There they lie in sullen stillness, or in weltering wildness, unlike all the world of water besides; resembling neither the sea in its grandeur, nor the inland lake by its quietude; and when fiercely stirred by a tempest, the dashing of the waves against a boat was compared by Lynch to the blow of a Titan's hammer, rather than the surge of an inland sea. When Abraham and his nephew looked—perhaps from Beth-el or its neighbourhood—on the Valley of the Jordan, the region seemed "like the garden of the Lord," and the younger of the two chose it for his

home : it was fair to the eye, and that was enough. But in less than a generation the cup of its iniquity was full. The people of that region could be endured no longer, and four or five cities were swept from their place. In degree, that catastrophe was worse than the flood : only water was employed then, but both fire and water here ; and apart from mere mental association, this sea still retains some of the features which naturally attach to a place where Justice, retributive, signal, awful, has set up her throne.

The Dead Sea, running nearly from north to south, is about seventy miles in length, by twelve or more in breadth,—the dreariest waste man ever saw, gloomy sullen, unlovely. It is depressed, as already noticed, above thirteen hundred feet below the level of the ocean ;* and is, therefore, a place of oven-like heat. It is bounded on either side by mountains which may be called lofty : those of Moab to the eastward, and the rampart crags above En-gedi on the western shore. The bed of this sea is peculiar. Throughout its whole length, and nearly in the centre, it is traversed by a depression, as ascertained by soundings, resembling the depression which forms the bed of the Jordan in the Ghor ; and this suggests the opinion that it was formed by some stupendous convulsion, which caused that bed to sink thirteen hundred feet below its former level, inundating the adjoining region, and turning it into this lake. More recent events augmented, most probably, the effects of the catastrophe,—effects of

* “ Thirteen hundred feet below, our sounding-lead struck upon the buried plain of Siddim, shrouded in slime and salt.”—*Lynch*.

which Abraham was a witness, and in which Lot was a sufferer. Strange things had happened prior to the most recent visitation. Wondrous prayers were offered (Gen. xviii.), wondrous visits from on high were paid, and unequivocal warnings were given; but all were unheeded: sin increased; and the Cities of the Plain perished by a double destruction,—that of fire, and that of water. Recent discoveries, in sounding this sea, have led to the supposition that at the time when the cities were destroyed, the southern portion of it was considerably extended, and that some of the land where the cities stood was annually overflowed before that fatal morning. But whatever we may make of such suppositions, be they correct or only guesses, there these cities lie, steeped for three thousand years in salt and sulphur, in bituminous abysses many fathoms deep, attesting the severity of the just Judge of the skies. Down there lie the remains of the multitude whom no warning could reclaim. It is a grave to them, and, moreover, a sea of death to all besides. Birds do fly over it,—they even nestle on its dreary shores,—but no fish lives there, though some are found in certain of the adjacent wadies, as in Wady Humeir, and Wady Muhariwat. The bitterness of the waters destroys all vegetable life, and the microscope can discover no traces even of animalculæ.' It is literally and absolutely the Dead Sea; and the chief thing that breaks in upon the gloom is the phosphorescent light which tips the waves at night, while everything around betokens the presence of strong igneous action.

The deep depression of this sea, already mentioned,

has given rise to many speculations. When happened that break, to the depth of thirteen hundred feet, which seems to be proved by the prolongation of the Ghor in the bottom of the sea? What were the changes which it produced? Such are some of the questions which have been asked—but the answer is not easy. It seems probable, however, that future investigations will show that in times indefinitely remote the Jordan flowed right past the region now covered by the Dead Sea, as it still flows past Jericho, or any other place upon its banks, and found its way along the Arabah to the south of the present sea till it reached the ocean at the Elanitic Gulf. There *are* difficulties connected with such a supposition,* yet it is the only one that seems at all to meet the requirements of the case. We must wait, however, for further discoveries before we can dogmatize; and meanwhile, the wonders of the scene are increased by the fact that for many centuries the Dead Sea has had no outlet for its waters. Evaporation is its only means of discharge; and the heat of that huge caldron, begirt as it is with rocks, which tend to render the place a focus of evaporating influence, is deemed enough to explain the peculiarity. Those who have wandered along its beach of salt, and have felt the torrid power of the sun, have been glad to take refuge even in the sullen waters. They are so buoyant that swimming is not

* "Both the depression of the plain, and the elevation of the ridge (which now crosses the plain south from the Dead Sea), may have been simultaneous results of the awful convulsion of nature by which the guilty cities were overwhelmed."—*Gosse*.

easy, till the swimmer has become acquainted with the element. The acrid water, which is salt as brine, and stringent as alum, is painfully pungent wherever the skin happens to be ruffled ; it stiffens the hair, as if with salted pomatum ; and, altogether, there is not one redeeming quality about this large reservoir. It is not beautiful, though its waters are transparent. It does not leap and laugh to the breeze like other seas—all is solemn, if not sullen, as if a vast pall hung over the abyss. But hear the words of one who has wandered by its shores :—

“Life and soul,” he says, “are wanting. It never seems to smile. No city nor village is on its margin ; no tree fringes its sands,—only a few reeds and oleanders here and there ; no skiff skims its surface ; no fisher plies his trade ; no Arab makes his dwelling here. All is desolation ; and were it not for the brightness of an Eastern sun lighting up the wave, its dreariness would be altogether intolerable. . . . One feels that to live here perpetually, within sight of all this gloom, and with all these memories floating around, would be oppressive beyond endurance. For bright as is the sunshine, and blue as is the sea, there is so much of dreariness and hopeless sterility, that you are glad to turn from it all to the fresh stream and wooded banks of Jordan.” The languor which creeps over the mind amid such scenes bears out the declaration of one upon the spot : “Where all else was desolation and decay, it was hard to divest ourselves of the idea that there was nothing but death in the world, and we the only living.” “The vast caldron of metal, fused but

motionless," to which this sea has been compared, is a fit pendant for such a mental picture. While the sombre scenery which surrounds the sea is a meet setting for the whole, it is the befitting sepulchre of the buried cities. The convent bells of Mar Saba, heard at night floating over these sullen waters, almost reconcile the wayfarer to the convent's existence.

The intense bitterness of this sea has been thus explained: Prior to the destruction of the cities, the water was fresh, but when that catastrophe took place such was the quantity of salt extruded from the depths below, that the bitter briny taste has remained ever since. The portion at the southern extremity, where the cities are believed to have stood, and which may be about fifteen miles in length, was then for ever submerged, and shared the fate of the rest of the lake. The rock salt which, as we shall presently see, abounds at Usdum, gives some colour to this theory; and the proportion of mineral salts held in solution is well known to be very great. But, after all, the peculiarities of this sea have never yet been fully explained; it remains a mystery in geology, and he will be wise who solves the puzzle.

The shores are at many places rocky and precipitous, so as to cut off all access to the water. There are recesses, however, amid this ruggedness, where a tropical vegetation re-appears, and where prose sometimes becomes poetry in trying to describe the beauty. Ain Jidy—"the fountain of the goat," the En-gedi of Scripture—is there, and is believed to be identified in a ravine on the western shore. There are caves there

and robber-like retreats, while the place is made attractive by some of Solomon's allusions to its beauties, as well as by some of his father's adventures. The green luxuriance of the recess is striking, and men who have rambled on the spot have told that the poetical allusions of Scripture are amply borne out by the reality (1 Sam. xxiii. 29 ; Cant. i. 14).

But there are other spots which rival even the quiet waters and the green beauties of En-gedi. In lively language Lynch thus describes another of these retreats—these oases on this sullen coast:—"Far in among the cane," he says, "embowered, imbedded, hidden deep in the shadow of purple rocks and luxuriant vegetation, lapsing with a gentle murmur from basin to basin over the rocks, under the rocks, by the rocks, and clasping the rocks with its crystal arms, was this little fountain-wonder. The thorny nabk and the pliant osher were on the bank above; yet lower, the oleander and the tamarisk; while upon its brink the lofty cane, bent by the weight of its fringe-like tassels, formed bowers over the stream, fit haunts for the naiads. Diana herself could not have desired a more secluded bath than each of us took in a secluded basin." The account of this Egeria of fountains is completed by a claim on its behalf to be the Diamond of the Desert eulogized by Scott. With humming-birds fluttering in beauty—and Lynch saw one—such spots are diamonds indeed.

Among the memorabilia associated with this sea was the sad doom of Lot's wife in connection with her longing, lingering look back to the scenes which she was

leaving. We have seen that the bay at the southern extremity most probably covers the site of the cities. That bay is separated from the upper and larger portion by a bank which runs nearly across the lake; and *there*, it is believed, lay the fertile Plain of Sodom. There was the wrath of God poured out upon the guilty Sodomites—at once a type and a rehearsal of the great catastrophe which is to wind up the history of our world as to its probationary condition. Even to this day misery at seasons haunts the scene. “Eyes smarting, skin burning, lips and tongue and throat parched and dry,” are the words employed by one when describing his visit. Nor need we wonder, for he records that “at midnight the thermometer stood at 98°.”

But recent discoveries tell of some things which connect the far past with the present by very close associations. When the American explorers visited the Dead Sea, they were attracted by a spectacle which occasioned wonder to all who saw it. On the western side of the southern bay, near Jebel Usdum, or Mount Sodom, they saw a lofty column standing, to appearance detached from the general mass of the hill, and which was found, upon examination, to be formed of solid salt, capped with carbonate of lime. The upper and rounded portion was about forty feet high, and rested on a kind of oval pedestal, from forty to sixty feet above the level of the sea. The pillar is described as a mass of crystallization. Some have not hesitated to say that this is the identical pillar referred to in Genesis; and superstition, embellishing to disfigure, has added that when any portion of the pillar

melts, it is miraculously replaced. We only say that such a pillar in such a place is suggestive. On one side rises the salt mountain of Usdum, on the other are the barren and lofty cliffs of Moab, where Lot found a shelter. Then in the foreground lies the lake, mysterious in itself, and rendered still more solemnizing by the wonders which have been witnessed on its margin; and all these combined place the pillar among the marvels of this scene.* The sterility which reigned around told the American strangers how terrible and how perfect was the overthrow of the Cities of the Plain. The place is not merely sown with salt—it is turned into salt itself; and the curse of perpetual barrenness is thus inwoven with the very nature of the soil. Such are the marvels of this and other spots around this sea, that one sceptic, at least, has confessed that his scepticism was cured by what he saw. The castled ruins of Kerak, where they are visible, and those of Masada with their bloody traditions, deepen the impression of the whole. It is a wondrous panorama, all marked with woe.

Reference has been made to the heat of the region. It cannot be told. In Wady Humeir, for instance, it is intolerable. Stifling winds, glaring sunshine, earth like an oven, and air like an everlasting sirocco, make men fain to crouch among the very sand or rock-salt for a shelter. It is needless to attempt to wear spectacles to save the eyes, for the metal soon becomes so warm that it cannot be endured. Metallic buttons upon the

* "Everything said in the Bible about the sea and the Jordan we believe to be fully verified by our observations."—*Lynch*.

dress are almost too hot to be touched. It is like the blast of a furnace, and is not *air*. Even the palm tree, which can find water if it exist at all, dies in that region; and a solitary living one in the wady offers but the counterfeit of a shade. The hot wind moans over the desolate scene, sad, like the dirge of all that is beautiful. And even bathing in the sea brings but a momentary relief; the instant the bather leaves the water, evaporation leaves his skin all pinched by a saline incrustation.

But while exploring the margin of the Bâhr Lut, does anything occur to determine what plant it is that bears the apples of Sodom? There are several claimants for that honour, but men now appear to be settling down in the conviction that it is the fruit of the osher plant. The leaf of this tree or shrub is oval, thick, and of a deep green colour, and is said closely to resemble the India-rubber plant. The flower grows in pyramidal clusters of a delicate purple tint; and the fruit, about the size of a small orange, is of a brownish yellow hue. When fully ripe, the rind become so fragile that it is very difficult to carry the fruit to any distance; and when it is pressed or struck, the dust which is contained in the interior rises like a small cloud. Hence the allusion to ashes in describing the fruit; though, unlike some other things in this wonder-land, the apples of Sodom cease, when narrowly examined, to be deemed so curious as travellers' legends make them. The fruit-stalk, when cut, discharges a viscous, milky fluid. The osher abounds at the southern extremity of the sea, where Wady Kerak enters, and where

the supposed ruins of Zoar are found, to which Lot retreated from Sodom.

Perhaps we should not close our glance at the Valley of the Jordan without some reference to the idea that has been entertained, virtually to blot that river out of being by turning the Ghor into a sea. It has been proposed to dig a canal large enough to convey ships from the Bay of Acre, in the Mediterranean, across the land to the Jordan. As the Sea of Galilee is more than six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and the Dead Sea more than thirteen hundred, that depth would all be filled up by the inflowing sea. The adjacent country would, of course, be laid under water, and an open channel from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Akabah would thus be formed. The project is scouted by some as Quixotic, owing to the geological structure of the country. It is not quite certain, however, that modern engineering could not achieve the stupendous undertaking, did it promise to repay the cupidity of modern times. Were it accomplished, then, of course, much of the country which we have been trying to describe would be hidden from the view of man. The sea thus introduced to the Ghor would do for the whole region from the Huleh to the Desert what the Dead Sea did for the doomed cities, and some of the most sacred scenes in the world would for ever cease to be, till the sea was summoned to give up its dead. Does not the very speculation upon such subjects shed some light upon many of the vexed questions connected with ancient sites and buried remains?

Were the traveller desirous of gaining, at one glance,

a view of the Dead Sea through its entire length, between the hills on the west, 1500 feet high, and the mountains of Moab on the east, which are estimated at 2000 or 2500 feet, he might be indulged by ascending the Mountain of the Quarantania, already mentioned as among the wildest and most precipitous in the Ghor. The view over Gilead, Ammon, Moab, and the Dead Sea, is such as amply to repay the ascent. Milton has seized upon it to adorn his poetry, or employed his poetry to deepen the impressions of the spot, and makes even Arabic gutturals mellifluous in his verse when he tells of—

. “ Rabba and her watery plain,
In Argob and in Basan, to the stream
Of utmost Arnon.
From Aroer to Nebo, and the wild
Of southmost Abarim, in Hesebon
And Horonaim, Seon’s realm, beyond
The flowery dale of Sibma, clad with vines,
And Eleale, to the Asphaltic Pool.”

But, assuming the truth of the tradition, the Christian wayfarer will find here something more impressive than even lofty mountains or a mysterious sea. Here the Lion of the tribe of Judah foiled the Destroyer; here he proved the omnipotence of truth; and here he taught the tempted where to find and how to wield a sure weapon of defence—the sword of the Spirit.

Having thus traced the Jordan, then, to its mysterious receptacle, its grave, from its cradle on the slopes of Mount Hermon, we can scarcely help glancing back over its two hundred miles of length, and recalling the fact that nowhere in all the world have equal wonders

been crowded into an equal space. The Euphrates has witnessed surprising revolutions; it has seen the extremes of mortal grandeur and mortal desolation. The Tigris has in this rivalled the Euphrates; for if the Babylon of the latter competed with the Nineveh of the former, in magnitude, in riches, and in guilt, have they not also been rivals in their terrible overthrow? Again: the rivers of the Western World roll in floods like seas, through scenes of grandeur with which the Old World has little to cope. But none of all these rivers gather round them the charms which attach to every inch of the shores of the Jordan. Here Abraham and Lot once dwelt, and here manifestations of holy justice, second only to those of the Deluge, were made, when Sodom and Gomorrah sank at the fiat of the Holy One. Eden, did we know the spot, would be solemnly sacred. Ararat, like some lofty tribunal erected for Omnipotence, speaks aloud of retributive justice. Sinai has associations which are all its own, and overmastering. Calvary speaks to all mankind, and, unknown as it is, it will speak in Scripture for ever and ever, of sufferings to which the huge agonies depicted in the Laocoon are an echo, or a shadow. But the Dead Sea—the grave of Admah, Zeboim, Sodom, and Gomorrah—speaks in tones well-nigh as deep regarding “the wages of sin.” It surely warns mankind to pause upon the road to ruin.

Further up the Ghor, other associations, but as solemn, emerge. There the Son of God has tabernacled; there miracle has been heaped on miracle; there heaven and earth have met. How blessed, then, could we

learn beside that stream to prepare for the Jerusalem that is above, and the streams which make glad the city of our God!

But we have seen that the Jordan loses itself in the Dead Sea. It is literally lost, and is never accounted for except in the simmering haze—the ghost of a cloud—of a hot evaporation. It imparts no freshness, with all its volume, to those acrid waters. Neither is there any life in that sea, and every living thing there finds a watery grave: it destroys as completely as fire. And O how like is this to the soul of man, absorbing blessing upon blessing from God on high, yet returning none! From moment to moment these blessings come, and might array us in the beauties of holiness; but all continues sterile, and will do so till He comes who proclaims, in the multitude of his mercies and the depths of his wisdom, “Behold, I make all things new.” “The sea will then give up her dead;” and how strange the sight, when the buried thousands of Sodom and Gomorrah emerge from this abyss! Meanwhile, “the curse of God,” exclaims Lynch, “is surely upon this unhallowed sea!”

A river traced from its embouchure upwards to its fountain is no unmeet emblem of human religions, or of false aspects and corruptions of the true. When thus traced upward, they diminish at every winding. If at some places they appear to expand, it is only to be speedily lost in some marsh; and when their course is traced nearer and nearer to their source, they become small by degrees, till at last they entirely disappear. The superstitions sink into the earth, out

of which they arose, as all earthly things are destined to do.

But a river traced from its fountain-head downward to the sea is as meet an emblem of the one divine religion, whether we regard its course through the world or in an individual soul. So small at its commencement that a little child could bound over it in sport, it widens and deepens as it flows. Its margin becomes fringed with beauty. It spreads fertility and verdure all around; and though it may at times, like the Jordan, be narrowed by rocks into a rapid, or dwindle in drought into a feeble stream, or dash at other times over cataracts—nay, even run under ground for a space, like the Jabbok—it is still, upon the whole, expanding; till at last that river could perhaps bear on its bosom the wealth of half the world, or float the navies of empires. He whom Heaven makes wise will surely make a selection between these two.





VIII.

THE RIVER ARNON.

THIS river falls into the Dead Sea, towards its southern extremity, upon the eastern or Arabian side, and is formed by the union of several smaller streams. Its modern name is the Mojeb, or Majeb, and it has a circuitous course of about eighty miles. In scriptural times it separated the land of Moab from the portion assigned to Reuben, to the east of the Jordan. The name Arnon is said to mean "a torrent," and aptly describes the river at some seasons of the year and some parts of its course. There were "high places" of idolatry somewhere on its banks (Numb. xxi. 28). The ravine through which the Arnon rushes is described by a writer of fifteen hundred years ago as "sufficiently horrible and dangerous." A Roman road crosses it about six miles from Rabba, and there are some ruins on the edge of the ravine, both north and south; and from the name, Arair, they are supposed to represent Aroer, "which is by the brink of the river of Arnon." Between the two spots where ruins are found the distance is computed at about two miles. The descent from the upper edge of the ravine to the water at some places occupies about an hour and a half, so precipitous

and rugged are the banks. On each side of the river traces of the old Roman road are visible, while some mile-stones and one arch of a bridge are still standing, inviting us, in one case more, to wonder at the pervasiveness of the world's former masters. When the river is swollen its struggle with the rocks must be terrific, and water-worn blocks lying along the margin far above the common level of the stream bear witness to its force. Rising near Katrane, to the east, the river receives the waters of Wady Lejun about an hour above Arair; from the north it is joined by streams from Wady Wale; and on the south by two other feeders from as many glens. Near the junction of the Lejun there is a level piece of land, where some ruins are found, and these are conjectured by some to be the remains of "the city that is in the midst of the river," mentioned in Joshua xiii. 9, 16, and elsewhere; but, as yet, conjecture is nearly all that we have regarding the sites or ruins on the Arnon.

All who have explored these defiles describe them as singularly wild, even for a region where such wildness is common. "When viewed from above," writes Burckhardt, "the valley of the Arnon looks like a deep chasm formed by some tremendous convulsion of the earth, into which there seems no possibility of descending to the bottom." Such cliffs approaching to each other at their summits, or seeming only a few yards apart, enable us to understand some scriptural allusions which are otherwise not easily comprehended. When David, for example, was the object of Saul's hatred, he had an interview with Abner in peculiar circumstances.

"David," we read, 1 Sam. xxvi. 13, "went over to the other side, and stood on the top of an hill afar off, a great space being between them;" and thus he and Abner, who were enemies at the time, conversed. Now if David was on one edge of a ravine and Abner on the opposite bank, they might carry on their conference with ease, and yet in perfect safety the one from the other. A hundred yards might be the only space between them, as appeared to the eye, but had they been to meet side by side, then they must either have scrambled down a precipice perhaps five hundred feet high, or wandered upward or downward till the lofty banks passed into level country.—While the truth of Scripture is the same for all, some of the settings of that jewel cannot be prized aright except when we are guided by local knowledge.*

The heat in the dell through which the Arnon flows is suffocating; and apart from the exaggerations in which travellers may be supposed to indulge, the gorge really seems such a scene as Gray might have had in view when he described the great Chartreuse, and said, in language not unworthy of Horace,—

"Presentiorem et conspicimus Deum,
Per invias rupes, fera per juga,
Clivosque preruptos, sonantes
Inter aquas, nemorumque noctem."

About eight miles north from the Arnon stands what

* "Several frightful ravines run down to the sea between Alma and Shemah, and so narrow, that you have no idea of their existence until quite upon their brink. The continuity of the surface seems unbroken."

—*Dr. Thomson.*

is reckoned Mount Nebo ; and under that mountain, as the chroniclers of superstition tell, the tabernacle and the ark were hidden by the prophet Jeremiah before the destruction of Jerusalem which he foretold. Near these scenes, the shore of the Dead Sea is composed of lofty mural cliffs of red sandstone, with ravines among them, where patches of cane are found ; and the Arnon here enters the sea through a delta formed by the river. The stream is there eighty-two feet wide, and four feet deep. It has cut its way, or had a bed prepared for it through a chasm ninety-seven feet wide, where the cliffs are high and perpendicular, and the variegated rock which composes them is worn by the rains of winter into fantastic forms, which Lynch, who describes them, compares to Egyptian architecture. He found it difficult not to suppose that they were the work of art. They *are* the works of art, but the artificer is He who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.

The chasm just referred to extends to about one hundred and fifty feet. At some places of the Delta the water is ten feet deep. The wild recesses of the Arnon bear the tamarisk, the cane, the castor-bean, the oleander, and other plants. Gazelles abound there, and Lynch says that he identified the foot-prints of a tiger. The vulture is his companion, and Arabs as fierce as either may not seldom be met with.

The Bible tells that it was to a city "in the border of Arnon" that Balak, king of Moab, came to meet Balaam, in the hope that he would practise some divination against Israel,—who, however, was safe under the shel-

ter of his Shield. Though the country watered by the Arnon was not included in the grant to the Hebrews, it was there that they first began to do battle, and take possession of their lot—from the Arnon to the Jabbok, on the east of the Jordan. As we have seen, Aroer was beside the former, and was a place of some importance and strength; but it was doomed according to the word of God, and in due time its glory departed: the saying has been literally fulfilled, “As a wandering bird cast out of the nest, so the daughters of Moab shall be at the fords of Arnon.” In modern times, at least, the daughters of that land have been seen at that spot, poor, abject, almost nude—“wandering birds” indeed.

It is scarcely enough, however, merely to say that Aroer stood on the banks of the Arnon, for that was no solitary city. The ruins of Elealeh, of Heshbon, of Meon, of Medeba, of Dibon, and other places, have been found to the north of the Arnon. To the south, those of Kir-moab, Rabbath-moab, and others are noted; all displaying, upon a scale which surprises us the more the longer we explore the country, both the ancient resources and the modern desolation of these scenes. It appears to the meditative mind, when wandering there, as if the Omnipotent were ever present, appealing to his doings in confirmation of his word. Scepticism may thus be silenced, and faith more and more confirmed; for though Servetus, at the time of the Reformation, and Volney, Voltaire, and others, since then, have deemed the modern condition of Palestine and the adjacent regions a refutation of Scripture, that was

only because the wish was father to the thought—they believed because they loved to have it so. Next to the condition of the Jews themselves, or what may be called the standing miracle of that monumental people, the condition of their own much-loved country both corroborates and explains the word of God. “He will do all his pleasure,” is written on every hill-side, in every valley, and every town of the land.

Near the Dead Sea Lynch observed several streams which emitted a fetid odour. One of these debouched from Wady Heshbon, and another was on the opposite or western shore, betokening the nature of the entire region round about the sea. One of these fountains he describes as brackish, with a temperature of 84°, and a strong sulphureous odour; but it augments the vegetation along its margin, while elsewhere there is no green thing. Barren mountains, fragments of rocks, the air tainted by the sulphureted hydrogen of the fountains and streams, sometimes occasioning nausea and sickness—all help to make the desolation doubly desolate.

But these are redeemed by the Zerka Main, the outlet of the hot springs of Callirrhoe, a sweet thermal stream flowing from a chasm on the eastern shore, a considerable distance north from the Arnon. Little spots of beauty are found, as we have seen, at some places on the beach, but the plants are characteristic,—henbane and night-shade or wolf-grape rank among them; and if a single pistachia tree or a spina Christi appear, it is instantly noted by the explorer as a wonder. Callirrhoe, however, deserves a closer inspection, were it only as

the place to which Herod, called the Great, resorted in quest of health during his mortal illness. The region at some points is grand and wild; and wherever there is fresh water, canes, tamarisks, and occasionally date palms, grow. The stream from the Callirrhoe springs is twelve feet wide and ten inches deep, where it rushes to the sea. Its temperature is 95° , and its taste somewhat sulphureous. It has worn a bed for itself among the rocks, and the sides of the chasm are perpendicular, while the banks of the stream are fringed with such shrubs as have just been named. The chasm is one hundred and twenty-two feet wide at the mouth, and continues the same for at least a mile inland. There are rapids and cascades in the current, and one fall is five or six feet high. Heliotrope and other flowers blow upon its margin. Birds of various wing and habit frequent the lonely scene; and the soft and tepid waters of the stream offer to the bather a singular and refreshing contrast to the heavy clammy waves of the adjoining sea. The waters which rush down the Zerka Main are in volume the greatest of all the feeders of the Bâhr Lut, except the Jordan.

The Brook Zered, mentioned more than once by Moses (Deut. ii.), is supposed to be that which falls into the Dead Sea near the Salt Mountain of Usdum. It rises, according to some, near Kulat el Ahsy, and after a course of about five-and-thirty miles, loses itself where the copious Jordan is lost; but as visitors to the land are not agreed as to the Zered, we need not further describe what some suppose to be that stream or wady.



IX.

THE KISHON.

THIS "ancient river," whose name means "winding," is now called the Mukutta, meaning "slaughter;" and as Joshua mentions both Kishon and Kutta as the names of cities in this region, the modern Arabic name for the river appears to be derived from the latter word.

According to some travellers, the Mukutta rises on the slopes of Mount Tabor; but according to others, on the eastern side of Carmel. The unquestionably perennial portion of the river is one of the shortest in the world, and has some peculiarities which perfectly explain the conflicting accounts of its length. According to those who say that it rises in Mount Carmel, its course is only a very few miles, while at certain seasons of the year it never properly completes even that brief current—it is lost in the sands which block up its passage on its way to the Bay of Acre, its rightful embouchure, and occasionally its real one. But all controversy on the subject may now be regarded as finally set at rest; for, in truth, the Kishon rises both on Mount Carmel and Mount Tabor. Its chief perennial source, or one of the chief, is on the slopes of the former; while at seasons the rains swell the mountain

torrents which descend from the neighbourhood of Tabor, and which render this torrent-stream so formidable as history, ancient and modern, proves it to be. The truth regarding its rise may be thus stated:—

At some places, on the highest table-lands between the Mediterranean and the Jordan, it is difficult to fix on the water-shed, or to say where the water begins to run to the east, and where to the west; and the fact is now ascertained to be, that some wadies which are emptied eastward or to the Jordan, are interlaced at their head with others whose waters run westward to the Great Sea. Now at one of the upper levels, near which these wadies take their rise, the collected waters are so divided that it requires much and patient observation to come to a decision as to their course or current; but the decision is, that near a certain spot—Ksalis—the water to the west of that village all flows westward to the Kishon.* In the same region other streams flow in the same direction. So that here is the fountain of the Kishon—of the Kishon at least as it exists during rains. En-dor is spoken of as being near the source, so that a great part of the waters from the Plain of Esdraelon is drained off to form the Kishon. The feeders, or constituents of the “ancient river” north and south of Jezreel, are to be ranked among the Kishon sources; but the most distant perennial source, Dr. Thomson says, is “the famous Fountain of Jenin itself,—the En-gannim, (“fountain of gardens”) given to Issachar by Joshua” (xxi. 29). That fountain is increased on its westward

* See “The Land and the Book,” chap. xxix.

course by the waters of Lejjun, and many other rivulets, as well as from divers springs and marshes,—none of them, nor all of them together, sufficient to maintain a current during the hot season.

The perennial Kishon, then, flows out from the roots of Carmel, nearly on a level with the sea. The water is brackish, and forms a deep, broad stream, quite near to its rise, creeping through a marsh towards the ocean; which, however, as we have seen, it never reaches at certain seasons of the year. It is largely swollen, of course, by the rains of the uplands; and it is then that the impetuous torrent in the plain below becomes the grave of those who rashly try to ford it. The ground is marshy—we read of its “bottomless mire and tangled grass;” and when men in dismay plunge into such a place, their lives are almost necessarily the forfeit.

When the river approaches the sea-beach, it becomes small by degrees, till at last it entirely disappears. At one time Dr. Thomson crossed it in a boat, and had to make his horses swim after him; but when next he passed there was no river, not even a rill to be found; for the sand, driven up by the sea winds so as to form an embankment, prevented its flow. A marsh is formed inland, and while the water slowly percolates to the sea, the adjoining country is much like a quagmire. The delta which the Kishon has formed at its mouth, is planted, says Dr. Thomson, “with picturesque and solemn palm trees,—the finest grove of the kind in Syria.”

The banks of this river, brief as its course is, are among the most illustrious in the world. It drains

part of the great Plain of Esdraelon, famed alike for its unstinted fertility and as the battle-field of many generations. It was by the overflowing of the Kishon that the army of Sisera was swept away (Judges iv. 13, v. 21); and a similar event took place during the French invasion of Palestine, about the close of the last century (April 16, 1799), when many Arabs were drowned in attempting to cross the river. But it was the victory of Barak over Sisera that first gave its great name to the river. That leader, followed by thousands of the Naphtalites, skilfully approached his enemy, and his assault, sudden and impetuous, led to an instant rout. "The clouds dropped water" on the scene; that is, it rained, and the river was in flood: as the routed army rushed down a narrow defile, horses and men were precipitated upon each other by the dread and the confusion, and the river and its marshes completed what the sword and the storm had commenced. It was seen that chariots of iron, though counted by hundreds, were a poor defence when the appointed day had come.

But besides the overthrow of Sisera's army amid the waters of the Kishon in flood, when Barak and Deborah could sing, "The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river of Kishon;" another memorable event is recorded in Scripture as having happened there. Away up among the hills of Nazareth, not far from that place, or En-dor, or Nain, is the "Fountain of Gardens," already mentioned, and its copious outflow spreads beauty in the orchards, and verdure in the fields along its course. At certain

seasons the water is so abundant that it breaks away from these secluded scenes, and in the days of Elijah the river witnessed transactions in singular contrast with the upland silence whence it flowed. There was a contest between the prophet of God, Elijah, and the false prophets of Baal collected in hundreds on Carmel. As that hill witnessed the contest and the victory, when its caves re-echoed the cry, "Jehovah, he is the God ! Jehovah, he is the God !" the Kishon saw the upholders of idolatry slain upon its banks. The abomination of Zidon had usurped the place of the living God ; and Baal received the homage which was due to the Supreme alone. It was time for Him to work ; and in spite of Jezebel's patronage, and Ahab's apostasy, the idolatry of the land was to be washed away in the blood of its supporters. A lofty Tell called Kussis, "the mound of the priest," is mentioned as perhaps pointing out the site of that event. It was a dread scene,—an instance of the terrible things in righteousness by which the purposes of God are wrought out. But He who in His adorable providence, swept the old world clean by a flood, and blotted Sodom and Gomorrah out of being for their sins by fire, and caused the idolaters of Canaan to perish by the sword, asserted His majesty in the same way at the base of Mount Carmel, on the banks of the Kishon. It was a dreadful remedy for a nation-wide apostasy ; and to this day there are traces of that day's doings in the region round Carmel. The scene of the contest between Baal's prophets and the man of God is believed to be identified. The same is true as to the place where the priests were slain, and

where the world might have learned, through all its ages, the folly of halting between God and Baal, or trying to blend heaven and hell. Justice, stern and inflexible, demanded a sacrifice which may not be offered now, except by the hand of Him who doeth according to His pleasure in heaven and on earth. But oh, how strangely does the quiet scene, as we gaze from the green ridge, "the glory of Carmel," or by the river, so gentle that it threatens to run dry, contrast with that deed of blood, that punishment inflicted for the true God dishonoured, and a whole people deceived! (1 Kings xviii. 40). The gazelle now bounds, and the lonely stork now stalks amid these scenes, "beautiful as paradise, yet all deserted;" and the whole is one scene more where the spirit-world and the Great Spirit of all can be vividly realized by the soul which He is teaching.

Even from brief notices of the Kishon, it may easily be inferred that its course is one of signal beauty. It rises in the neighbourhood of Tabor, and along its course the heights which bound the Plain of Esdraelon are in view. The mountains of Gilead to the east, Little Hermon and Gilboa nearer at hand, and the hills of Samaria to the south, are all in sight. It skirts the Carmel range, and at some places dashes against the rocks or the roots of that mount. Far up among the slopes was the spot of Elijah's contest; selected, some believe, that the descending fire and the whole interposition might be manifest to "all Israel gathered together at Carmel." Conjecture is not a safe guide in such a case; but some allege that many of the col-

lected people might take their stand that day in "the splendid and open area of the Plain of Esdraelon," and there be witnesses to the majestic, overwhelming demonstration. At all events, some of the verdant slopes or wooded heights of Carmel, as they look upon "the ancient river," formed the scene where some rays of Jehovah's glory flashed forth.

That river leads down to the expansive Bay of Acre, and the yet more expansive sea; and as many a spot along its course—for example, En-dor, Nain, and other places—is celebrated for some marvel, the neighbourhood of the Kishon, upland and lowland, with its feeder wadies—for example, that of Kusab, or "the cane," with its bubbling brook and towering oleanders—ranks among the most interesting in the land. Then the magnificent Plain of Esdraelon, which is about thirty miles in length from east to west, and eighteen miles at its greatest breadth, is one of the wonders of Palestine. It has been the scene of battles which have decided the destiny of nations, and some of the most stirring events of Jewish history happened there. In regard to aspect or beauty, every town, every village, every rock and fountain, every spot, upon or around the plain, has attractions, either local or historical; and viewed as a portion of the land flowing with milk and honey, the great Plain of Jezreel (another name for Esdraelon) might furnish the food of hundreds of thousands. Miserable as is its modern culture, and wretched as are the people who till it, the wheat and other crops which it produces, on patches where only the surface has been scratched, amaze those who are accustomed

to see the greatest skill and most persevering labour wringing but meagre returns from less prolific soils.

This "battle ground of the nations" has been wet with the blood of Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, and Crusaders. Persians, Egyptians, Druses, Turks, Arabs, as well as the Western nations, have all, as invaders or as conquerors, as pursuers or pursued, met on that plain to decide their contests, or to shed their blood. Prophecy, moreover, points to Esdraelon, as many think, under the name of Armageddon, the destined scene of the last great conflict of all: so that the past, the present, and the future, combine to fix our thoughts upon this majestic plain. It is now a scathed and blighted scene, compared with what it once was; but it will resume its beauty when the set time has come. It is not so much a tomb as a place of rest; and great things may yet be accomplished there, when the Mighty One shall arise to "make a short work on the earth," and when one year shall do what now requires a hundred.

Yet no one who even but glances at the present state of the land can fail to notice how it is everywhere scarred and defaced by the woe which has followed the sins of the Jewish people. That blighting influence is very distinctly seen in Esdraelon. Though a garden for fertility, and wrapping up in its capacious bosom enough to aliment whole tribes, it is, as we have seen for the most part waste and sterile: a divine sentence has gone forth, and the fruitful place has become a desert. "It is a solitude," says one traveller; and another and another re-echo the sentence. "It is almost

entirely deserted," writes an exact observer. "It is very fertile, but uncultivated," adds another. And yet another significantly says, "The Arabs sometimes decide their battles there." In brief, we may lament for the vanished fertility of Jezreel as Israel mourned for the good king Josiah, who fell in battle on that plain, and whom "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned."

But whence this long desolation? In some of the uplands not far from the plain there are temporary lakes which might be turned to good account for irrigation. About Sanur, for instance, or two hours from Jenin, among the fountains of the Kishon, a lake is formed in winter many miles in circumference, imparting fertility to a wide region, and, if properly managed, capable of fertilizing much more. But, like Tantalus parched with the cup at his lip, nearly the whole district is sterile. Now we may speak of Esdraelon as a specimen of Palestine, so peeled and blasted through all its borders, and ask, Why this long night, this dreary winter, in a region once proverbial for its exuberance? The same sun is shining above. The sky still sheds down its dews. The Kishon is still there to fertilize. Esdraelon, in short, spreads out its ample bosom to the heavens just as it did two thousand years ago. Whence, then, the treeless, sometimes leafless plain? It was studded of old with towns and villages, each engirdled by vineyards, or shaded by the olive—all is now blank, dreary, saddening. Evermore, then, the question comes back—Why? Because the curse is pressing on the land whose people cast out the Holy One and the Just. For many generations He had borne with

them ; his repentings were kindled ; he could not give them up. But at length their cup was full, and he did make them like Admah and Zeboim, the cities of the plain now submerged in the Dead Sea. As God had blessed Israel to an extent that had never fallen to the lot of any other people, the abuse of their blessings turned them into woes, and now the land mourns ; even Esdraelon is desolate. The Kishon, with all its attractions, only lends the flash of its beauties to the surrounding decay.

Nor is it only when we gaze, from the high lands near the springs of that river, over Judea as a whole, that these impressions are deepened upon the mind. In individual cases, from the monarch to the menial, we know that transgression was rife. Think of Saul, for example, hurrying away to En-dor, on the borders of Jezreel. He has gone in opposition to the express prohibition of the law of his God—propelled by the gloomy forebodings which seemed to whisper of his coming doom. The Philistines were encamped between En-dor and Gilboa (1 Sam. xxviii. 4), so that the king had to make the circuit of his enemies ere he could reach the cave of the witch,* where the apparition, however produced, or-permitted, announced the doom so speedily fulfilled on the adjoining mountains,—“To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me ; and the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.” That dark and troubled soul only precipitates itself upon still deeper troubles by the

* To this day the neighbourhood of En-dor abounds just in such caves as the inspired narrative implies.

unhallowed path which it pursues. The king turns from the living God to consult an impostor : he has more confidence in the creature "that peeps and mutters" (Isa. viii. 19) than in the Eternal One ; and what can the end be but death ? Yet why concentrate our accusations upon Saul ? Is not every man, in spirit, doing the same, who turns from the oracles of the living God, to consult, in preference, the wisdom of the world, to imbibe its spirit, and to copy its models ? What is many a German critic, or many a learned commentator, but just the abandoned king restored—honouring the creature, dishonouring God most high ?

But away up among those high lands, not far from En-dor, nestled Nain of old, now represented by a cluster of miserable huts. It is surrounded by ancient tombs in ruins, toward one of which, no doubt, the widow's son was being carried when the Saviour restored him to life and to his mother. It was a touching scene, an emblem of the goodness of God over all, and in profound contrast with the Satanic doings in the En-dor cave. But such are man's doings in contrast with those of God only wise and only good, and the devout mind will feed its devotion on the gentle and the winning goodness of the Holy One to all who trust in Him before the sons of men. Such a soul will exult at Nain, but join trembling with its joy at En-dor.





X.

THE LEONTES—THE ORONTES—THE OWELY—THE KURDANY—THE ZERKA.

THE river system of Palestine—*i.e.*, the Land of Promise as commonly bounded—is very simple: it would scarcely be too much to say that it is as simple as the general structure of the human frame. The Jordan may represent the spinal column, while the tributaries which join it from the east and from the west naturally complete the parallel to the osteology of the body; and that nearly exhausts the rivers of Palestine properly so called.

At the same time, there are others besides the Kishon which flow westward to the Mediterranean, and though some of the chief of these are not contained in the territory that was subjugated by Joshua, or held by his immediate successors, they help us so fully to understand the contour of the goodly land as embraced in the promises, that a brief account of them is submitted.

1. THE LEONTES OR LITANY.*

This river, which is at some places called also the

* Some question the propriety of either of these names as applied to this river, and allege that it had no title of old except "The Tyrian River."

Kasimieh,* is the largest of those about to be described, and rises among the spurs of Lebanon, in the Fountain Ain es Sultan, not far from Ba'albec. It traverses the plain of Cœlo-Syria, and, after running its course south and south-west, it falls into the Mediterranean somewhat to the north of Tyre. It is fed in the uplands by fountain after fountain, especially by the noble sources of Mushgharah. On its banks are found numerous castellated ruins ; some of them rivalling those on the Rhine, alike by their extent and the marvellous beauty of their site. The whole length of the river, including its countless windings and twistings and doublings, ere it can find or force a way to the ocean through the mountains which girdle it, is computed at not less than one hundred and twenty miles ; and the descent in that course is fully four thousand feet. One of the castles has the Western name of Bellfort, and the Eastern designation of Kulat es Shukif. It hangs on the edge of a precipice over the Litany, and even now indicates the strength that was required for man's defence against man in the crusading times from which it dates, though most probably it only succeeded to a fort much more ancient. The river raves madly downwards, at a depth, some say, of fifteen hundred feet below the ruins ; and a little antiquarian skill, if we can withdraw our gaze from the wondrous grandeur of the gulf and the foaming river, may enable us to discover traces of Phœnicians,

* Kasimieh means "*division*," and Dr. Thomson and others trace the name to the fact that the Leontes divided the territory of the Jews from the regions beyond, at least at some points of its course

Saracens, and Crusaders in the pile. The banks of the Litany here, and at many other places, supply lairs for the leopards which abound in a solitude so like what they love; and a traveller, exploring the wondrous scene, has been arrested in his way by a half-devoured goat, on which some more pretentious animal had just been banqueting.

But we should listen to the words of those who have seen this wondrous river, and told, as far as words can tell, the aspects of the scene. The Litany, Dr. Thomson says of a certain point in the river, is hence "engaged in a furious struggle with Lebanon for a passage to the sea. It has cut out for itself a narrow groove in the solid strata, so deep that no one at a little distance aside from it would suspect that a powerful river rushed between him and the opposite rocks. Yet there it is at the bottom of the chasm all in a foam, leaping, darting, roaring along. Now it whirls round the jutting base of some mighty cliff so sharply that you are sure it bursts from the rock itself. Below, it runs madly against another towering wall from which you see no escape; but *it* does, and darting along the base at a terrific rate, launches its whole force against a similar barrier, only to recoil in shattered fragments and shoot like an arrow down some secret pathway quite hidden by overhanging rocks and interlacing sycamores. After about ten miles of this work, it does, in reality, come forth from the dark mouth of the mountain. At a place called Kuweh—or 'the window'—it has tun-nelled through a rock more than ninety feet thick, and comes out quietly at the bottom of this solemn chasm.

Not long to rest, however, for immediately afterwards it springs madly down among large boulders, reduced in width to half a dozen feet, but of depth unknown. The road passes over this natural bridge from Wady et Teim, to Nihah, on Lebanon. Some six or eight miles further south the road from Jezzin to Hasbeiya crosses at Jisr Burgus, and there the traveller has a fine specimen of our river and its behaviour among the rocks. But you must look upon it from the cliffs of Blat, some five miles below, where it is eight hundred feet beneath you, tearing at the very roots of Lebanon, and rasping out a passage for itself with mighty din and desperate haste. . . . Turning westward below Blat, it has cut a channel across the southern end of Lebanon, at a place called the Khutweh, some two hundred feet long, and so very narrow that I have sat on the west side, and laid my hand on the opposite precipice, which rises at least one hundred feet perpendicular above the water. The river darts, swift as an arrow, through this groove, and, like the shuddering visitor, seems to hold its breath in terror. From this onward the scenery is less wild, until it turns the corner south of the castle of Shukif, and makes toward the sea. This last descent of eighteen or twenty miles abounds in noble scenery, but it must be seen to be appreciated." *

The Litany is little known to the Western peoples, and all who have visited it manifestly toil and struggle with an impossibility when attempting to present a word-picture of that river. It is "no tame silvery line," one exclaims, "wreathing through plains or corn fields;

* "The Land and the Book," chap. xii.

no broad sheet of water, with towns and hamlets, hills and valleys reflected on its mirror; but a wild mountain torrent, whose green waters dash headlong and foaming over their rocky bed, as if it were a monster serpent chained in the yawning gulf many a hundred feet below, where she writhes and struggles evermore to escape her dark and narrow prison among these fearful rocks, but always in vain, save only near the sea, where, an hour and a half north of Tyre, her windings reach a close. You would perhaps feel dizzy were I to ask you to fancy yourself on the edge of the furthest projecting wall of the castle, and looking down from a height of fifteen hundred feet—the height of five tall spires piled above each other—upon the glorious torrent as it rushes past at the foot of the perpendicular rock of Sjukif. In that far deep below, its waters hurtle and roar along, with a ceaseless, deafening din, but their voice may not reach us here in our calm height. . . . The awful gorge of the Leontes, with its eagles' nests and leopards' dens, is beyond all description grand and bold."*

"Its eagles' nests." There are great numbers of the royal bird hovering over these wild gorges; they seem to give a character to the scene. The conies of the rock furnish them a plentiful repast; and those who love to sit on rocks, and muse over flood and fell, gaze in rapture on the free flight of the king of birds in this befitting home. The habits of the eagle, as referred to in the Scriptures, can be studied there better, perhaps, than in any other part of Syria, and the spectacle is described as at once exciting and instructive.

* Van de Velde.

Some have entertained the thought of carrying a railway up the bed of the Litany, so as to connect the Mediterranean with Hamath, Aleppo, and the Euphrates, as well as Damascus and other places. But Dr. Thomson judges that the engineers who made the proposal could never have explored the wild region which their plan proposed to utilize.—The Leontes was the northern boundary of the Promised Land, in as far as it was really subdued by the Hebrews.

Considerably to the north of the Litany, and towards Beirut, is the River Damur, the Tamyras of one ancient author, and the Damura of another. It rises under the lofty ridge of Lebanon, and after receiving several other streams in a course of five-and-twenty miles, it falls into the Mediterranean near the village of Muallakah. It is subject to sudden rises, and the devastations which it produces along its course are known alike to the husbandman and the traveller: the labours of the one and the life of the other are often destroyed by the impetuous Damur. Bridges are swept away, and, in spite of bounds built for the stream even by the Romans, it defies all human limitations. The height and depth of some of the rocky ravines through which it rushes, or whose waters it drains, are peculiarly grand.

2. THE ORONTES.

Nearly as much might be said regarding the Orontes—El-Aazy, “the rebellious river”—as has just been said regarding the Litany. It also rises near Ba'albec, but

takes an easterly course at first, and drains the country of Riblah, Emessa, and Hamath (Num. xxxiv. 8, 11; Josh. xiii. 5). Near its source it is a tame and simple river, but it gradually acquires a more decided character, and its margin becomes bold, precipitous, and pathless. Wild fig trees, and the vines which festoon between them, turn many a dell into a jungle there; and he who would leave the activities of public life to seek a solitude that is utter, would find it at a hundred places on the banks of the Orontes. Among its wild recesses, where robbers make their lair, and where the lawless men of a lawless land regard might as right, it is often curious to notice the blending of superstition and crime—twins in the moral world, as closely related as ever were twins in the physical. Prayers repeated by rote and system, as if by a machine, may precede or instantly follow a raid of death. The Orontes waters Antioch, which was built at a bend of the river, and is thus illustrated by the labours of apostles and the sufferings of apostolic men upon its banks; but it lies beyond the limits of the Holy Land as actually possessed by the Jews, and we do not dwell longer on its description, inviting as the task appears from “The Fountain” where the river rises, to the sea where it is lost.

In an age when the impression is gaining ground that many of the old mines of interest are wrought out, and new scenes are needed to prompt adventure or cherish the spirit of enterprise, it is satisfactory to know that there is still so much fresh beauty to regale us, so much that has seldom been explored, at once

to stimulate and reward the traveller. The banks of the Leontes and Orontes, with Mount Lebanon which they partially engirdle, would amply repay the enterprise of thousands of tourists for many a year; and were the government of these regions either strong or wise, no doubt thousands would hasten to be gratified as a few have been.

While turning away from any detailed account of the Orontes, it would be wrong not to advert to the fact that on its banks the followers of Jesus were first called Christians (Acts xi. 26). At Antioch, once imperial, now a ruin, the apostles found one of the centres from which to operate on the nations; and, in consequence of their activity and success in that capital, the Christian may there find the second cradle of his faith: it is at least the fountain of the name which he wears.

3. THE OWELY.

This river, which is rarely named, takes its rise in the fountains of Baruk, about thirty miles north-east from Sidon, and is the Bostrenus of antiquity. For about fifteen miles it flows through a wild ravine, till it joins another branch in the vale or plain of Bisry. It then finds its way to the Great Sea, through a series of gorges which repeat in miniature the scenes on the Litany. Dr. Thomson says that the southern branch of the Owely "plunges down a cataract at Jezzin two hundred and forty feet perpendicular—plumb as a line." When the river is in flood the fall is magnificent; and

there are several others equally grand in its course. Torrents from Lebanon leap down to swell its flow, and bounding from their giddy precipices, they render the vicinity like a living, moving thing. The lofty cliffs of Lebanon—the free eagle—the wild beast—the grand forests—the joyous cascades, and the ceaseless rush of many waters far down in the valley and far up on the mountain,—all make one wonder that the Owely has been so long unknown. Nor are other attractions absent. At the head of the Merj Bisry, there are the ruins of an ancient temple, with columns and debris, indicating that superstition has been here to pollute the scene, as at a hundred other places on the slopes of Lebanon. A bridge of a single arch, constructed in part of ancient Phœnician stones, spans the river at a point which adds greatly to its beauty; and one quits with regret the wildness of these upland recesses, the aisles of this majestic temple reared by the great Master Builder, even for the rich orchards around Sidon, which are adorned, almost created, by the waters of the Owely.

4. THE KURDANY.

The neighbourhood of Acre is one of the least healthy along the shores of the Great Sea; and the chief reason is supposed to be the effects produced by the Kurdany, a dark and sluggish stream, which rises at some fountains to the east of the town. It is the Belus of the ancients, and is now called the Nahr Naaman. The fountains which feed it appear to form a marsh,

which is sometimes called a lake by courtesy, and may be about three miles in circuit. The course of the stream is not more than six miles in length: its neighbourhood is miry and repulsive, and the whole river is, in truth, the very contrast of the bounding, joyous Owely. It is noticed here chiefly because of the tradition, or, as some would persuade us, the historical fact, that it was on the beach where this river enters the sea that the art of glass-making was first accidentally discovered. Some pirates, it is said, were cooking their food upon the shore, and, as the sand was melted, a rude species of glass, or at least a vitreous substance, was the result of the combination produced by means of the alkaline sea-weed employed to make the fire. The legend is most probably a fable, though the neighbourhood of Acre abounds in substances which even in their natural state approach the character of glass.

5. THE ZERKA, OR CROCODILE RIVER.

This is another stream which falls into the Great Western Sea, a little to the north of the ruins of Cæsarea Palestina. There are various branches of the stream scattered over that marshy region; but at one place the waters are embanked and raised twenty-five feet by means of a dam so broad and strong that the highway has for ages passed along it. By means of that wall the marsh of Zoar is formed, dignified by some into a lake, and covering many thousands of acres.

But the Zerka is referred to here neither for the

beauty nor for the copiousness of its stream, nor for the artificial peculiarity of its fountain-head. It is noticed because some entertain no doubt that it is the Crocodile River of antiquity; and in truth there are living crocodiles to this day found in the marsh. One was recently killed, about nine feet long, and as thick as the body of a man. The explanation given of this peculiarity of the Zerka is, that in ancient times a colony of Egyptians were stationed here. They carried their gods with them, and the crocodiles of this day are the result. They may well live and luxuriate amid the reedy swamps and jungle of the marsh, and neither food nor shelter need be wanting. It is known that these animals existed there at the time of the Crusades. Still more ancient authors refer to the same fact: and thus have we, perhaps, one proof more, and that a peculiar one, of the inter-connection of this land with the land of Egypt.

On the same coast there are other streams, some of them sluggish and black as ink,—for example, the Miamas. It is the product of a number of springs at a little distance from the coast, and its waters were originally conveyed by an aqueduct to Cæsarea. There is also upon this coast a river called Mufjur, which descends from Belad er Roha; but it is needless to dwell at greater length upon brooks which would be nameless in any country but an Eastern one.

Or, if we proceed further south along the western coast, the Valley of the Eshcol, which is supposed to be now identified, might furnish other illustrations of truth. The magnitude of its clusters of grapes has fur-

nished materials for many a scoff, and fed the desires of many who were interested in finding the Bible to be untrue. But those who have searched into the matter have told that clusters weighing from ten to twelve pounds each are not uncommon in our day at some places in the East, and that the safest mode of carrying such bunches is just that adopted by the spies. Nay, clusters have been known to reach the prodigious weight of thirty or forty pounds. Some of them are as much as three feet in length, while the individual berries are nearly an inch. So rich are the productions of the vales of Palestine when sun and water meet, and so baseless are the objections raised by unbelief against the facts of the Bible.

POOLS AND FOUNTAINS OF JERUSALEM.

There remains still one topic relating to our general subject which should be briefly considered ere we close,—namely, the pools and fountains immediately connected with Jerusalem.

Outside the Jaffa gate, then, is the Birket Mamilla, or Upper Pool of Gihon, an artificial tank or reservoir, about three hundred feet in length, two hundred wide, and twenty deep. The water which collects there (when there is any) is conveyed into the city by a small aqueduct, and supplies what is called the Pool of Hezekiah, within the walls. The water of that inner pool is used chiefly for baths in the city, and hence another name for it is Birket Hammam. The Birket Mamilla, however, is eclipsed by the Lower Pool of

Gihon, now called Birket es Sultan. It is about six hundred feet in length, two hundred and fifty feet wide, and forty feet deep ; but as the supply of water is limited, and as the aqueducts or other feeders are broken down, the real grandeur of this cistern has passed away. Both of them might be filled as of old, but they are not water tight ; and, like much more about Jerusalem, seem hastening to decay.

In the bed of the Kidron, near the junction of the Valley of Hinnom with that of Jehoshaphat, is the modern Beer Ayub, the ancient En-rogel. Its site is said to be five hundred and fifty feet below the summit of Mount Zion ; and we are thus enabled to form a correct idea of the defences of the city, at least at this point (Josh. xv. 7). In this vicinity various events happened in former times which could not easily happen now. David's friends, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, lurked and gathered information for him here when Absalom rebelled. Adonijah here slew sheep and oxen to feed and bribe the multitude when he was aiming at the kingdom : so that this region must then have been different from its present condition. But whatever may be thought on that subject, this well—like those of Abraham at Beersheba, and of Jacob near Shechem—is a remarkable example of the importance of such reservoirs. It is one hundred and twenty-five feet deep ; and at times the overflow is so great that the volume is capable of driving a mill. But in its ordinary condition the water does not rise to more than half the depth of the well, where a current on the surface indicates that the supply is flowing off by some un-

known channel. In consequence of myths and traditions, or in connection with historical facts, this well has been called the Well of Job, the Well of Nehemiah, the Well of Fire, and the Well of the Spies ; but its own depth and copious supply, its sweet pure water, and the historical events which connect the name of David, of Solomon, and others, with "the stone of Zoheleth which is by En-rogel," are enough to give interest to a spot so famous (1 Kings i. 9).

In the same neighbourhood is the Fountain of Siloam, made famous by the poetry of Milton, and yet more so by the incidents connected with it in Scripture (Neh. iii. 15 ; Isa. viii. 6 ; John ix. 7, 11). It appears, however, from the reports of modern travellers, that the place is now utterly vulgarized. Far from being poetical, it is scarcely even tolerable ; for "the sights and scents" which there disgust the visitor mar all romance, and reduce the scene to more than common-place. The controversies as to the taste of the water of Siloam—whether it is sweet, or bitter, or tasteless, or brackish, or sweetish—seem lost in the accounts of its offensive surroundings by some recent visitors. "I never could endure it," Dr. Thomson says, "always thinking that it smelled and tasted of the bath. I have little doubt but that it is mingled, to say the least, with water used for Moslem ablutions and bathings in the great mosques of Omar and El Aksa." That there is a connection between this pool and the subterranean water stores known to exist under the site of the ancient Temple, is scarcely doubted now. Indeed, we seem to be on the eve of

some great discovery explanatory of these long-concealed stores ; and when that is made, some of the inquiries connected with Siloam may be answered. Meanwhile, the pool—which is perhaps fifty feet in length, about twenty feet deep, and as many wide—appears to have been over-praised to an extent which has provoked a reaction in some minds. Neither Enrogel nor Siloam, it is said, can now appear anywhere but in the eye of a dreamer as sending forth to Zion—

“The flowery brooks

That wash thy hallowed feet and warbling flow.”

These remarks, however, can in no sense apply to scriptural times, when there was no Moslem abomination there, and when it was true that the waters “went softly.”

The Fountain of the Virgin is also found in the Valley of the Kidron. It is an intermittent spring, as Dr. Robinson has proved ; but some mystery² hangs about it, as if it also might eventually be found in some way affected by the outflow from beneath the Temple. It is connected by a sinuous subterranean channel with the Pool of Siloam, but were it not for the water which it supplies it would scarcely deserve a notice here. It is another spot around which superstition has thrown its enshrouding mist.

These water supplies for Jerusalem (and others might have been mentioned) are found in the Glen of the Kidron, or in the Valley of Hinnom which joins it. The gorge along which the Kidron finds its way to the sea is one upon which every traveller delights to expatiate, closely associated as it is with the Saviour's

history and the scenery around the forlorn city. It is dry for the greater part of the year, for the waters which flow into it or near it are absorbed, like many larger supplies, in moistening gardens of herbs along some parts of the channel ; so that they reach the Dead Sea by under-ground percolation, not in a visible current. The descent from the capital to the Dead Sea is not much less than four thousand feet, and the wild gorge of the Kidron which leads thither is one that well deserves the title of "The Valley of Fire," which is applied to part of its course. At some places the banks, or rather walls, of the valley are estimated at twelve hundred feet in height. The Convent of Mar Saba, one of the most wondrous abodes ever selected by man, has hung there like an eyry for fourteen hundred years. Brigand Arabs frequent the place, as furnishing fit haunts for those whose business is plunder and whose hands are against all men. The true coney of Scripture, so timid and so shy, finds a congenial asylum in this vast wilderness. In short, without controversy, this is the most signal wady in the Holy Land, and, by consequence, in the world. The hoary Jerusalem, the suffering Saviour, David, Asa, Josiah,—all help to invest this torrent bed with special attractions for the student of Scripture. The Garden of Gethsemane ; the Mount of Olives ; the towers of the ancient city, or at least a fragment of them ; the Dead Sea ; the Pillar of Usdum, and other sights—all combine to shed a peculiar charm around the glen. From the Pool of Siloam near its commencement, to the sea where its waters—when the Kidron is a stream—are lost, it

is one wild, romantic gorge, which has struck some of the bold and the enterprising with awe. No environs could be more befitting the discrowned city than are to be found on the margin of the Kidron; and no more meet approach need be sought than the pathway, which one or two have trod, up that wady from the Dead Sea to the capital of Judea—and the world.

In these notices of the water supplies of Jerusalem we have adhered to the old distributions. But should the theory ever be proved which makes Mount Zion and Mount Moriah the same, and places the Valley of Gihon between that mount and *the present* Mount Zion, the account here submitted must be modified. A change so sweeping, however, should be thoroughly canvassed; while in the interests of truth all that is *proved* should be instantly accepted, whatever it may cost.*

Nor should the Pools of Solomon, in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, be passed over in silence here. Whether El Burak, as they are named, be really the origin of the "fountain sealed" in the Song (iv. 12), it is not essential to decide, but they are magnificent memorials of the most magnificent of the Hebrew kings. There is an unusual harmony among travellers in Palestine as to the authorship of these huge reservoirs; yet it is another instance of the oblivion which has buried so much, to discover that the mind which planned and the hands which formed such memorials of the past are left to conjecture or presumption. There are three pools in all, of which the largest is 582 feet long, 207 feet wide at the widest point, and 50 feet

* See Fergusson's Essay on the "Ancient Topography of Jerusalem."

deep ; the second is 423 feet in length, 250 in width, and 39 feet deep ; the third is 380 feet long, by 236 in width, and 25 in depth. They are all narrower at the upper than at the lower end ; and Dr. Thomson remarks of the largest, that “when full, it would float the largest man-of-war that ever ploughed the ocean.”

To supply these magnificent cisterns, the water of the vicinity is curiously collected. There is an old castle with rooms under ground where the water first appears. It is conveyed thither from the fountain-head, which is at a short distance, by an artificial channel many feet below the surface of the earth ; and the whole apparatus, which is at once intricate and royal, is one proof more of the preciousness of water in those regions. In the year 1703, the traveller Maundrell visited these reservoirs, and told their underground wonders. But since his time additional light has been shed by more exact explorers. Under the castle just referred to the springs are collected in a chamber about fifty feet in length, and half as much in width, and conveyed thence to the pools.

It is known that the contents of these cisterns were carried in part to Jerusalem by an aqueduct ; and in part, as some believe, used to water the gardens of Solomon, which were placed in this region. The remains of an aqueduct are found apparently leading in the direction of Wady Urtas, in the vicinity,—a scene of unwonted beauty, on account of the springs which are there ; and held to be the Etam where the sumptuous and misguided Solomon “made him gardens and orchards, and planted trees of all kinds of

fruits, and *made pools of water*, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees." But whatever may be our conclusions regarding some minor details, two things are obvious here. First, the gigantic conceptions of the men of other times may well tend to lower the modern assumption of superiority, at least in some respects. What the Pyramids were as tombs, or the colossal Statues at Thebes as monuments, or the Coliseum as a place for sport, these Pools of Solomon were as reservoirs of water. And secondly, the fertility which reigns in Urtas, and at other spots in this vicinity, tells of the latent productive powers of this land, and of what it will yet become, when it shall please God to roll back the dark oppressive system of misrule which now makes the earth as brass beneath men's feet, and the inhabitants like slaves, who must live with their lives in their hand, and all that they possess at the mercy of the prowling, plundering Arab.

But these Pools of Solomon are not alone in this part of Palestine. To the south-east of Beit Jibrin, the ancient Eleutheropolis, there is a long succession of caverns, which can be traversed on horseback. They resemble ancient cisterns; and are so numerous and so vast as to fill the visitor with amazement at the colossal excavations. They are hewn from the solid rock precisely as cisterns were; and though the roofs of some have fallen in, and the partition walls between others have crumbled away, there can be little doubt as to their original destination. They are all circular, and one which Dr. Thomson measured was sixty-five feet in diameter, and upwards of one hundred feet in

height. He conjectures that they were cisterns for the supply of Gath; and the figures and inscriptions in mixed Cufic and Phœnician characters which he describes give verisimilitude to the conjecture. At Zikrin, about six miles north-west from Beit Jibrin, there are vast excavations of a similar nature, extending over several acres, and pierced by forty openings for the drawing of water;—another and another proof that this country under ground vies with that in which our own lot has been cast.

But we pass from all these, and all else that can be said concerning “the land of hills and valleys, which drinketh water of the rain of heaven.” After all that travellers have written, or admirers uttered in eulogy, or sceptics in scoffs, it must still be said, to those who wish to become acquainted with the wonder-land, “Come and see.” Gerizim, the mount of blessing, is the type of one section; Ebal, the mount of cursing, may represent another; but the whole, viewed together, is like a second Bible, or at least a vivid commentary on the first; and the traveller who has not visited the country where God in very deed dwelt on earth among men, has yet to enjoy some of the rarest pleasures which this world can yield, by visiting the hills and the valleys, the rivers and the lakes of the Holy Land.

Thus do we close our remarks upon these scenes. Incidentally and briefly the part of Palestine where David reigned and sang, and where apostles preached and toiled, has been glanced at. Its hills and valleys are peeled and bare. Its ancient people are scattered, or trodden to the dust in their own land, and yet there is

an indestructible tie between it and them. The Rod from the stem of Jesse, the Righteous Branch which flourished there, till it was rudely hewn down, seems still to spread His shadow over it; and we cannot wander by its streams or its lakes without being drawn into communion with Him still—communion which may be the closest that can be enjoyed till we reach the heavenly Canaan and the Jerusalem that is above. Is the prediction yet to be fulfilled, “It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea?” (Isa. xi. 11.) Then, a groaning and travailing world may well stand on tiptoe for that consummation, for is not “the receiving of the Jews” to be “life from the dead” to the Gentiles? They are not all unwise, then, who are investigating such points with the book of the prophets open before them. Some may have formed visionary theories, and laid down as visionary maps of the future,—they may actually have tried to be prophets; yet their labours are not *all* like water spilt upon the ground. Nay, in their measure, they are preparing for the time when He who is to return once more to earth shall come “without sin unto salvation;” and if our preparedness for that advent be hastened or helped on by lingering among the rivers and the lakes of Palestine, they will become to us as wells in the desert, or as vineyards in the wilderness.



XI.

RIVERS OF SYRIA.

THE BARADA AND AWAJ, OR THE ABANA AND PHARPAR.

WHILE describing the brooks of Palestine we have often had occasion to notice how completely they fail in summer. Owing to a peculiarity in the strata, a few sink into the earth for a while, and then re-appear, but others periodically run dry,—they cease to be streams at all. Instead of remaining to gladden and refresh amid the torrid heat of summer, they leave man and beast, and flower and shrub, to pine and be parched, and die. It is the patriarch's deceitful brook (Job vi. 15) realized to the life, and one illustration more found in the Palestine of the present to shed light on the Bible of the past. But we are now to wander by the margin of one stream, at least, which is for many miles a bold, impetuous torrent, though it also is at last absorbed.

If we suppose a traveller from the West to have made Damascus his head-quarters, the rivers which would invite his attention there would be the Abana and

Pharpar, if they can be known. It is supposed that they can ; and he would accordingly either proceed to their fountain-head, and trace them downward,—which were, in some respects, the natural course ; or, starting from their embouchure, he would trace them up to their fountain, through the sterility wild as that of the Desert of Sinai, which at some places bounds the larger of the two. For convenience, we adopt the latter method ; but before commencing the journey we may glance at Damascus itself, with its countless streams and ever-green environs.

It claims to be the oldest city in the world, and dates at least from the days of Abraham, for his steward was Eliezer of Damascus. The Orientals call it, “a Pearl surrounded by emeralds.” Julian the Apostate said concerning it, “The great and sacred Damascus surpasses every city, both in the beauty of its temples and the magnitude of its shrines, as well as the timeliness of its seasons, the limpidness of its fountains, the volume of its waters, and the richness of its soil.” Mohammed refused to gaze upon its beauties, assigning as his reason that he did not expect to see a paradise twice, once here, and once more hereafter. But it were endless to quote the praises of Damascus. The Occidental vies with the Oriental in his encomiums upon it.

Yet the prominent place which it holds in Scripture might entitle it to an ample notice. It is mentioned, we have seen, by Abraham (Gen. xiv. 15, xv. 2). It was originally governed by its own kings, but was taken and garrisoned by David, (2 Sam. viii.) The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks,

and the Romans, were in succession its masters. In apostolic times it was held by Aretas, who ruled over Arabia Petræa, and who was father-in-law to Herod Antipas (2 Cor. xi. 32, 33); and in the time of Nero ten thousand Jews were butchered at Damascus, by command of the emperor.

But it is mainly as it is connected with the history and the labours of Paul that this city is interesting to Christians. It was to Damascus that he hastened "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts ix.). It was on his journey thither that that Lord hailed him with the words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" It was there that he suddenly saw a great light, and was smitten to the earth by that power with which he had madly tried to cope. There may be some difficulty in crediting the tradition which points out the very spot where that miracle was wrought. A Christian grave-yard and a huge mass of stone are said to indicate the place: it is most probably a figment;* yet after all, though it were the very inch of ground, what of that, compared with the ineffable results of that change upon the destiny of man? Be the place, then, where it may, it was to Damascus that Paul was conducted after his all-decisive interview with the Redeemer, and it was there that the spiritual light first dawned on the future apostle's soul. It was there that the Lord appeared in a vision, and assigned his life-and-death work to the apostle. There that lion, now transformed into a lamb, began to confound the Jews and prove that Jesus is

* Four different places are indicated, miles apart.

the very Christ. There also he first tasted of that persecution which he had himself so ruthlessly promoted ; for his life was put in jeopardy from the day that he turned from the service of man to that of God. In this way Damascus is intimately and for ever inter-linked with the history of the Church. Effects were there produced which are not yet expended,—nay, which eternity will not exhaust. The sum of them is augmenting from hour to hour ; for next to the crucifixion of our Lord on Calvary, and the sending of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the most important event in the history of the Church was the conversion of Paul near Damascus. The Christian looks at that city somewhat as he looks at Jerusalem ; and amid the crowding attractions, or the still more numerous offensive sights of the place, this thought may well be supreme—Our God has here appeared in the glory of his power ; he has here erected a marvellous trophy to his grace.

But the present object is, not to describe cities, but rivers and lakes, and we therefore proceed to the environs of Damascus, and the rivers which render it so green and so famous. The plain owes its fertility and its beauty mainly to the Barada ; deprived of that it would fade as a flower that is gathered withers on its stalk. It is the Chrysorrhoas of what is called antiquity, and the origin of as much beauty as any of the rivers, even the most renowned. Rising in the plain near Zebedany in Anti-Lebanon, it hastens to the plain of Damascus by a course at which we are just about to glance. The quantity of water which it brings down is very great ; for the Barada is a deep, broad, and rapid river.

Though not fewer than nine or ten branches or canals are drawn from it to irrigate the environs, and water the city, it still flows on, till it is lost in certain lakes or marshes somewhat to the north of Damascus.

The Yesid and the Taurah are the two chief canals, and spread fertility for miles along their courses. By means of these and another smaller canal, several villages are supplied, and a ceaseless verdure maintained, amounting to a richness which seems actually fabulous. Salihiyeh, Akraha, and a crowd of other villages, scattered round Damascus, are thus provided for; but a system of canalling, similar to the net-work of rails spread over some portions of our island, characterizes the whole vicinity.

If the Barada be the Abana of Naaman, then the modern Awaj is the Pharpar. It is formed by the currents flowing from a number of fountains, and from some of the ravines on the south-eastern slopes of Mount Hermon. It is at first a lively river, though small, and after reaching the open country, it meanders on its way, giving off canal after canal, to irrigate and fertilize the fields, the gardens, and the orchards along its course. Besides the Barada and the Awaj, there is no other stream of any importance, so that these must be the Abana and Pharpar. Ravines and fountains, indeed, send down streams at many points, but only to be speedily drunk up by the plain: and even the Awaj, at some seasons, does not reach the lake where it is lost; it is absorbed by the way. The brook called Nahr el Mukubrit, or "the sulphureous river," is spoken of by Dr. Robinson as a fine stream; and he refers also to

natural springs, and to the remains of an aqueduct found at some parts of the plain, as further exhibiting the water power; but all these sources are exhausted by irrigation and the torrid sun, and few of them reach the marshes, which are to the Barada and the Awaj what the Dead Sea is to the Jordan.

In consequence of this peculiar and copious water supply, the vicinity of Damascus, as we have seen, is one mass of living green, on which every traveller delights to dilate, while some, like Lamartine, draw upon Oriental hyperbole to describe Western impressions. Outside the irrigating influence, the plain is sterile like the desert; and that sufficiently explains the secret of the fertility, a fertility which the cautious and careful Addison thus describes:—

“We were looking down,” he says, referring to the most remarkable view-point of the city, and one of the most beautiful, perhaps, in the world—the Kubbet Seiyar—“we were looking down from an elevation of a thousand feet* upon a vast plain, bordered in the distance by blue mountains, and occupied by a rich, luxuriant forest of the walnut, the fig, the pomegranate, the plum, the apricot, the citron, the locust tree, the pear, and the apple, forming a waving grove of more than fifty miles in circuit, possessing a vast variety of tints, a peculiar density and luxuriance of foliage, and a wildly picturesque form, from the branches of the loftier trees throwing themselves up above a rich underwood of pomegranates, citrons, and oranges, with their yellow, green, and brown

* It is about seven hundred.

leaves ; and then conceive our sensations, to see, gradually rising in the distance above this vast superficies of rich, luxuriant foliage, the swelling leaden domes, the gilded crescents, and the marble minarets of Damascus ; while in the centre of all, winding towards the city, ran the main stream of the River Barada. As we descended, here and there the openings of the trees displayed little patches of green verdure, or a glimpse of rich, cultivated gardens. The whole of the rich tract was surrounded by a mud wall, beyond which all was arid desert."

Dr. Robinson speaks more exactly of this wondrous view. It is reached by a narrow, crooked path cut in the limestone rock ; and at the elevation just mentioned, there is a wely, or small Moslem temple—the Kubbet Seiyar. There is the glorious prospect ! The interminable plain, numerous villages, canals, rivers, gardens,—above all, the city itself ; and, in another direction, the chasm of the Barada, as it emerges from the mountains upon the plain, with precipitous banks six hundred feet high, fill up the scene ; the whole forming a panorama which multitudes go far to see, and which, when seen, they tell us, can never be forgotten.

But we may linger here, ere we ascend the main stream, to find other attractions besides those which originate in natural beauty. The Barada, we have seen, renders all around it like an emerald ; and it was, no doubt, the remembrance of that loveliness which prompted the Syrian captain to exclaim, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel ? May I not wash in them, and be

clean?" The prophet's injunction to dip in the Jordan, and so be freed from his leprosy, appeared to the haughty leper to be an insult. His ten talents of silver, with as many changes of raiment, and six thousand pieces of gold, seemed enough, and sure to purchase all that he needed. Such a man could not fail to find the prophet obsequious, and a path to a cure made plain. But far from that; his silver and his gold were rejected: the prophet of Samaria had only one prescription to give,—“Go, wash in the Jordan, and be clean;” and the implied alternative was,—“Decline, and continue a leper as thou art.” Now all this may well illustrate the waywardness of men when they first set out in quest of spiritual health. They always try to buy it. If they do not offer silver and gold, they at least trust to repentance and suffering, to their goodness or their tears. But all is unavailing. The way of regaining spiritual health is unique, and He who opens it up is inexorable. We must either adopt his divinely simple method, or continue hopelessly uncured. The fountain opened for sin is as resolutely and as exclusively pressed upon the sinner's notice as the Jordan was on the notice of Naaman; and when we *do* wash in that fountain, we are made clean every whit. The soul becomes what Adam's was before he fell,—without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. And this is indeed the central truth of the Bible. To it all the prophets give testimony; on this point especially they reckoned—

“Each spark of truth a brilliant gem,
To plant in kingly diadem.”

In the orchards round Damascus a traveller from the West is sometimes affected to the verge of tears by the melancholy cooing of turtle-doves, which frequent the vicinity in great numbers. The murmur of the streams and the complaints of these timid birds form a sobering counteractive to the joy occasioned by the prodigious flush of beauty which turns this region into an Eden. The dove which David describes as "covered with silver, and her wings with yellow gold" (Ps. lxxviii. 13), is also found among the gorgeous groves of Damascus; but its complaint is so very mournful, and so ceaseless night and day, that its midnight lamentations have prevented some from keeping the lovely but melancholy creature.*

We cannot roam far over the world without observing, that just in proportion to the bounty lavished upon man by the God of nature, the more degenerate does man become. Travel through every zone, examine man in every latitude, and that will be found a general law. Moral abominations multiply, man sinks and becomes imbruted, just in proportion to the richness of the productions and the fineness of the climate where he dwells. From Great Britain to France, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and onward to the regions far away where summer is perpetual, we can trace an ascending scale of physical bounties, and a descending one of moral character. But one illustration might suffice for all. Where do we find the most debased and blood-thirsty of mankind—in one horrid word, the cannibal? In regions where autumn is perennial, or where the bud,

* "The Land and the Book," chap. xix.

the blossom, and the fruit are contemporary,—where earth, and sea, and sky combine to pour profusion into the lap of man.

Now that general law operates powerfully amid the ever-green shades and the laughing beauties around Damascus. Among the fruits found in the gardens there, Dr. Robinson mentions, besides the olive, oranges, lemons, citrons, apples, pears, quinces, peaches, apricots, almonds, plums, prunes, grapes, figs, pomegranates, mulberries, walnuts, hazel-nuts, pistachioes, and others. The wines of Damascus, he says, rank among the best in Syria. Grapes ripen in July, and are said to be found in the market eight months yearly. So much for the paradise which to Oriental fancy excels all others, or what an imperial apostate called “the Eye of the whole East.”* Yet, in spite of such bounty, and of the humanizing effects of intercourse with many lands, the Damascenes long continued amid the most bigoted and hating of all men. Even so late as July 1860, the tidings were spread over the world that no Christian durst venture to leave his house in that city, lest death at the hands of fanatical men should meet him in the streets. It was once death for a Christian to appear unguarded there: those days have again returned; and the city from which Paul had to escape, by being let down from the wall in a basket, retains its bad pre-eminence to this very hour. There is only one power that can tame fierce man, or curb his passion

* We can form some idea of the productions of Damascus by the names of some things common among ourselves,—*e.g.*, Damask cloths; Damascene (Damson) plums; and lastly, Damascus blades.

for persecution and violence, and it is not found in the most affluent bounties of Providence.

As to the three lakes which receive the waters of the Barada and the Awaj, when the latter is not absorbed in the plain, little need be said. The two northern sheets receive the waters of the Barada, and all that flows from the northern portion of the plain. These *bahrets* are nearly of the same size, or about twenty miles in circuit, by six or seven in diameter. Their surface is much covered with tall reeds and waving canes, some of them from ten to twenty feet high; and such jungle forms the favourite retreat of wild swine. Different branches of the Barada flow into these lakes; but so powerfully absorbent is the soil, and so evaporative is the sun, that there are seasons, though they are rare, when these sheets of water entirely disappear.

The third lake, or bahret, is smaller than either of the other two. They are connected with each other, and in floods sometimes meet; but the third is completely insulated. Its circumference is about fifteen miles, and its diameter about five. The River Awaj is emptied into it; but both it and the lake have been known to be entirely dried up.*

It is time, however, to proceed at least to look at the beauties which meet us along the course of the Barada, from Damascus up to Zebedany. It would be long to tell of the other streams—the brooks or little rivers—which are found in this region, rising chiefly from fountains. Wherever fruit-trees can be planted, fruit

* See Robinson's "Biblical Researches," vol. iii., sect. 10.

grows in abundance ; and there are spots—for example, in Wady Helbon—where the wine mentioned by Ezekiel (xxvii. 18) was produced, and where the vine still thrives, though the vine-dresser can scarcely find a foothold while dressing it. But turning aside from these, and pressing upward to Ain Fijeh, parts of the Barada are passed where it plunges downward in its chasm, leaving no room for a path. It is spanned at different places by bridges. Orchards of fig trees, vineyards, and other luxuriant productions, fringe it at some points. The rugged jutting rocks cause the river to run in almost opposite directions at different places, like those steep railways in America which cross themselves at some points, so difficult and so tortuous are the lines. At one place the only practicable path on the Barada is through a tunnel hewn along the bottom of the cliff, and high enough to allow a man to walk nearly erect. A little way above it, the road enters a narrow and precipitous chasm ; and this is one of the most picturesque spots along the course of the stream. At no great distance is a beautiful fountain—Ain el Khudra ; but, like a beauteous infant born just to die, this spring instantly rushes to lose itself in the river. But other admirable things are here lost sight of, owing to the neighbourhood of

THE FOUNTAIN OF FIJEH, AND SUK-BARADA.

For this is another of the fountain-wonders which abound in the East. It rises at once a full, large stream, a rival in volume for the Barada itself. It is on the



SOUK BARRADA.



THE BARRADA AT DAMASCUS.

left bank of that river, and has been compared to the fountain at Tell el Kady on the Jordan. It tumbles and foams along a rocky bed to the distance of about a hundred yards, when it falls into the Barada; and it is at once so rapid, so deep, and broad (about thirty feet), that no one ventures to ford it. The water is sweet, pure, and limpid; and though the purposes of irrigation draw some of it off at the very fountain, it falls into the Barada stronger than that stream itself.

The fountain is found in a small cavern, with two low openings; and there are some remains of building there. A platform is artificially formed above the fountain, and upon it are the ruins of a small temple, built of large hewn stones; but no trace of any ornament remains. Besides these, there are some other massive erections of very considerable extent,* indicating that the whole was most probably covered by a very strong vaulted chamber, fifteen or twenty feet high. The conclusion forced upon the mind, by these and the other ruins of the place, is, that there was erected here a small temple dedicated to some divinity; but whether by a Christian to his God or a pagan to his, there seems nothing now to show—though no doubt it was paganism that presided here. The ruins indicate a high antiquity. The place is shaded by orchards and groves, and the song of the nightingale bassed by the rushing of the streams, with the other beauties all around, furnishes such a retreat as fable would at once assign to some of the gods of paganism.

* Dr. Robinson, in his "Biblical Researches," vol. iii., sect. 11, gives all the measurements and details.

This short river, then, only about a hundred yards in length, is reckoned by some the real Abana. We are about to proceed upwards, however, from this Ain Fijeh to the real fountain-head. The main river near this fountain is hemmed in by rugged escarpments of rock from eight hundred to a thousand feet high; and bold bluffs, or sharp and soaring peaks, give a strange, wild character to the *entourage* of El Fijeh. The denseness of the foliage at some points prevents the adjacent villages from being seen, except through a veil which all but hides them; and hence the vicinity is one of exquisite beauty. About five miles from the fountain there is a Grecian temple in ruins, on a projecting point which overlooks the Barada and its valley. Many fallen columns, measuring thirty-one inches in diameter, and one of them more than nineteen feet in height, indicate that the place was massive, at least, if not vast. There are also some large Corinthian capitals, and other decorations, which show how substantial the structure was; but the god and the worshipper have disappeared together, as from a thousand other sites.

The next point of very prominent interest along the river is what Dr. Robinson calls Suk Wady Barada, on the south bank of the stream. The pass of the Suk* is shut in by rocky cliffs of great height, and these walls of the chasm are not more than fifty yards apart. In the centre of this pass, opened for man by the river,

* This word is differently spelled by different authors—Suk, Souk, or Shuk. According to Stanley it means *street*. The pass referred to in the text is Suk Barada, or “cleft of the Barada.” It is also called Suk-el-Goosh, “the pass of the old wife.”

the Barada is spanned by a bridge of a single arch; and in its vicinity all is wild, desolate, and impressive. Antiquity throws her hoary mantle around the whole, and the most prosaic or passionless soul cannot repel or resist the impressions of the scene.

At various places in this neighbourhood there are ancient remains, broken columns, hewn stones, and even whole columns, with other things, which show that all ages have been attracted to the spot. Many sepulchres are excavated in the limestone cliffs above; and the ascent to these is one of no little peril: they seem to be inaccessible, except by scaling-ladders from below, or a rope and basket from above. They are laboriously wrought, however, and contain numerous niches for entombing. The crypts and burying-places have been ransacked by modern curiosity, or pillaged by older cupidity; and the result of all investigations is, that this Suk-Barada is one of the marvels of Syria. The ancient road, for example, is excavated to the width of fifteen feet through the solid rock, at the height of about one hundred feet above the present bridge. At some places the sides of the chasm are from six hundred to eight hundred feet high; and for two hundred yards the excavated road is carried through that rock. This, with the remains of aqueducts, of a temple whose pillars were standing little more than a century ago, and other vestiges of the past, all awaken curiosity, and make progress slow amid such a succession of marvels in such a spot.

But there is a key to explain, perhaps, the whole. Above the road in this wady, and on the smooth wall

of the rock, inscriptions are found which trace some of these wonders to the age of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, or about the year 166-169 of our era. One of the inscriptions tells, that "The Emperor Cæsar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus Armeniacus, and the Emperor Cæsar Lucius Aurelius Verus Augustus Armeniacus, restored the road when injured by the force of the river, and that by cutting through the mountain." Their ambassador and pro-prætor of the province of Syria, Julius Verus, superintended the work. These ruins and inscriptions indicate the site of an ancient city; and Dr. Robinson supposes that it stood upon the northern bank of the Barada, where the road, the aqueduct, the sepulchres, and the temple are found.

But these things refer to a date which is of yesterday compared with the pretensions of tradition here. Nearly opposite to the village of Es-Suk, on the summit of a cliff eight hundred feet high, the Arabs say Cain buried Abel. His reputed tomb is shown there; but it is just the remains of some ancient building. The portion allotted to the remains of Neby Habil, "the prophet Abel," is about nine yards long; but the ruin admits of the tomb being extended, if tradition chose, to more than twice that length. There are many other ruins in the neighbourhood. Among the rest a small temple, forty-five long and twenty-seven wide, with vaults, sarcophagi, and other things, which show that this singular perch was once popular at least as a place of sepulture. The explanation of the whole is, that the ancient city of Abila stood in

this pass, or at the distance of about eighteen miles from Damascus. Abila was doted and confirmed to several members of the Herod family, and the district, Abilene, is mentioned by Luke (iii. 1); but in process of time the place faded from the page of history, and for many centuries continued as unknown as its temples and relics are at the present day. That Abila was a place of splendour is manifest; but, significantly enough, the chief witness now is a necropolis.

The tradition that floats in the region regarding Cain and Abel is perhaps worth recording. One form of it is this:—The two sons of Adam had the world divided between them. But Habil (Abel) removed his boundary stones into Habid's (Cain's) portion. The latter was incensed, threw the stones at his brother, and slew him. In great grief the survivor carried the corpse about the world for five hundred years, till at last, on the top of a hill, he saw two birds fighting. The one slew the other and buried it in the ground. Cain took the hint, interred his brother, planted his staff to mark the spot, which became seven Syrian oaks, and these are still standing. The ruin already referred to is Abel's grave; and antiquaries wonder whether the legend gave rise to the name of the city, Abila, or whether that name originated the legend.

Be these things as they may, Wady Suk Barada is a spot which, once visited, will be always remembered. The valley upwards, indeed all around, is richly cultivated wherever culture can be employed. Fruit trees of various kinds are abundant; and travellers love to pitch their tents among them, to enjoy a landscape

where wildness, grandeur, and beauty weave all their charms into one. The vale above is "a picturesque and cool retreat, flourishing as with the richest English cultivation; shaded roads, rose-covered hedges, delicious pastures; the people friendly and hospitable, clean in their dwellings, and comely in their appearance." Such is the picture.

The village of Suk itself is signalized amid this beauty. Its houses, each a model of neatness, adorn the slopes of the surrounding hills, and appear to be the abodes at least of competence. Its vineyards, and patriarchal sheikhs; its salubrious atmosphere, and its river abounding in fish,—all seem to point to Suk as the happy valley. Amid such multiform beauties, we might suppose that we had found a retreat for innocence at last, could we forget that man is everywhere and always man, and that nothing but the truth of God can lift him from the degradation which sin inflicts.

A waterfall on the Barada, from twelve to fifteen feet high; the Vale of Zebedany with green fields pervaded by the river, which is here deep and still; villages scattered over the valley; and wadies bringing in their contributions to the main stream, are what the traveller sees upon his upward way. The Vale of Zebedany, just mentioned, is about seven miles long; and in the south-west corner of its broadest part is the supposed fountain-head of the Barada. But other springs abound in this region, and it would be difficult to say which is absolutely the head. At one place, for example, there are three different fountains, all tending to render the plain marshy; and the reputed, most probably the

real fountain, is a small lake or pool, described by Dr. Robinson as situated near Bustan el Arab. It is, perhaps, three hundred yards long by one hundred in width, and not more than two or three feet deep. Reeds, flags, water-lilies, and other aquatic plants, abound in it; and thus, at the height of three thousand six hundred feet above the level of the sea, with mountains nearly seven thousand feet high, in the distance, we stand at the fountain of another river, not so sacred as the Jordan, nor so peculiar, but possessing two qualities in which it is outrivalled by no other stream: it forms the Suk-Barada, and it surrounds Damascus with its cincture of evergreen glories, its luscious fruits, its coolness, and its countless charms. After all, however, even such things cannot make men wise, or happy, or good. True happiness is within the reach of those who never wandered half a mile from home.

It is by no means our design here to attempt to enumerate all the fountains and streams which are scattered over this upland portion of Syria. But passing to the north-west from the fountain-head of the Barada we find one spring and river which we may describe, as exemplifying, perhaps, a hundred others. We refer to the great fountain of Ainjar, giving rise to a stream which hastens to fall into the Litany. The spring-head is surrounded by ruins which lie upon a slope of one of the Lebanon spurs; and these ruins are said to belong to a place which was fortified, and of importance in crusading times, and capable of containing a large population, as it was

an irregular square of about a quarter of a mile on each side. The great fountain, Neba Ainjar, lies at the foot of the Anti-Lebanon range, and forms a copious river in a deep-winding channel immediately after leaving the birket, or pool, in which it boils up. The spring is compared, in copiousness, to that at Banias. The water is limpid and fine, and is soon employed in turning a number of mills along its course. It is regarded as in some degree an intermittent fountain; and some say that at irregular periods, occurring six, eight, or even ten times in a day, the quantity of water increases and diminishes.* This fountain is deemed by many the true source of the Litany; and where it falls into that river it is generally larger than the main stream itself. Just below its rise Neba Ainjar flows in a channel eight or ten feet deep, and is forded with difficulty, except at places where the bed is wider, and the rushing stream more shallow.

It has been said that the outflow of the Ainjar is believed by some to be intermittent. Many other fountains and streams belong to that class. Among these the most remarkable is Neba Fuarr, the source of what is called the Sabbatic River. According to the account of Josephus, that stream flows only on the seventh day, the Sabbath; while according to Pliny it flows for six days and rests upon the seventh. These, however, appear to be only the exaggerations of ignorance, or of the love of the marvellous; and the truth seems to be, that the Neba el Fuarr rests for two days

* Dr. Robinson thinks that the intermissions may be accounted for by the shutting or opening of some of the sluices which draw off the water.

and flows upon the third. Superstitious legends and ignorant exaggerations all apart, it is a natural phenomenon easily explained. Even such noises as sometimes occur when the discharge begins, as at the fountains of the Aŭjah of Damascus, can easily be explained. The Geysers of Iceland form the climax of such phenomena, though it is not needful here to offer the solution.

At Neba Shemsin, about a mile from Ainjar, is another fine fountain, which helps, like many more, to spread fertility in the great plain, the Buka'a, or the space between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon. But without dwelling further upon these fountains, we only observe, that nothing can surprise us more than the volume of water which rises from many of them—forming a very considerable river on the instant. At Hasbeyiah, at Banias, at Tell el Kady, at Fijeh, and now at Ainjar, specimens of such fountains are found. They are a wise and beneficent arrangement, made by Him who doeth all things well, for counteracting the sterility which would prevail in those regions during a large part of the year, where rain is not abundant, and where springs are therefore precious as gold.

One other peculiarity may be mentioned ere we leave the vicinity of Lebanon for the rivers of Mesopotamia. We refer to the temples which abound on the slopes, and even on the summits of some of the Lebanon mountains. Dr. Robinson has discovered not a few of these; and in the region around Lebanon, and upon it, he has described at least twenty such mysterious erections. Regarding the greater part of them not a vestige of his-

tory remains,—the temples, the gods, the worshippers, are alike unknown; and vague conjecture is all that exists, at least at present, to indicate the purpose, the age, or the divinity of most of these structures. One of them may be of the Jewish epoch; some of them are Grecian, and therefore comparatively modern; of one of them it may be a question whether it be Druse; but of the far greater number the only conclusion that can be reached is, that they are of Phœnician origin,—that Baal, or the Sun, was the god, and that they formed some of the high places against which the prophets so loudly inveighed. A description of one temple is submitted as a specimen of the whole, and the selection is made because the temple is near the fountain of Ainjar.

On the margin of the Buka'a, then, stands the village of Mejdél; and near it are the ruins of a temple, striking at once in position and extent. It fronts the north, and commands the vista of the Buka'a, there carpeted with beauty, and shut in on the one side by Anti-Lebanon, and on the other by the loftier range of Lebanon itself. The body of the temple is 82 feet long by 46 wide. A portico of several columns faced the north; but these columns are all prostrate now. At the base, their diameter is 4 feet, and further up, 3 feet 9 inches. Huge Doric capitals and fragments of the sculptured pediment lie around. Some of the stones of the fabric, as measured by Dr. Robinson, were 21 feet long, and 5 feet 8 inches high. In some cases they are finely bevelled, resembling the bevelling at Jerusalem, but perhaps a little deeper.

The grand portico was 14 feet 6 inches broad, with sculptured side-posts, each 24 feet high by 6 feet wide, and 4 feet 3 inches thick. Alternate niches and columns decorated the interior, which is about 60 feet in length and 35 in breadth—the altar at the south end occupying 12½ feet. The height of the temple is from 35 to 40 feet to the cornice.

Dr. Robinson pronounces this temple of Mejdél Aïn-jar the finest and best preserved in this vicinity, with the exception of Ba'albek. "It is simple, massive, and beautiful," he says, "and obviously of a severer, earlier type, than any we had seen, and also than those of Ba'albek." Everything regarding it, however, is wrapped in profound mystery; and, as far as modern research can decide, we must wait till the final day ere we know more than we do regarding the temple of Mejdél. The men of far-off days were no doubt busy planning it, rearing it, worshipping in it, and admiring at once itself and its prospect. But all are now lost in indiscriminate oblivion; and as we moralize upon one of these fallen columns, or these monster stones, we begin to feel as if there were something deeper than wit in Lord Macaulay's allusion to the New Zealander moralizing amid the ruins of London upon the fall of empires,—especially of Britain.





XII.

THE RIVERS OF MESOPOTAMIA.

1. THE EUPHRATES.

WE now pass to the region which is regarded as the cradle of the human race. From it mankind spread over the world in a manner concerning which some hints at least are conveyed in the earlier portions of the Bible.

By pre-eminence, the Euphrates is called in Scripture "The great river." Like the Tigris, or Hiddekel, it is mentioned as one of the streams of Eden, and was subsequently named as the northern or north-eastern limit of the land promised to the children of Abraham. It accordingly became their border under their great warrior and poet king; and as it was also the eastern limit of the Roman empire, it has held a conspicuous place in Oriental history.

The Euphrates rises, like the Tigris, among the mountains of Armenia. Its fountain is traced by some to two springs; the one, the Kara-su, near Erzeroum; the other, called the Murad-chai, is considerably more to the east. Two streams from these rush through the wild mountain passes of the uplands of Armenia, till



they unite near the terminus of the mountain region in their course, where the combined volume raves wildly amid the surrounding rocks. It seems to have cleft or worn a channel for itself, and tumbling as it does over falls and down rapids, the infant Euphrates gives early presage of what it is hastening to become. On the left bank of the river stands the town of Bir, said to contain four thousand inhabitants; and at no great distance is a place called Urfah, which is reckoned by many that Ur of the Chaldees which was the native place of Abraham.

Many travellers have rejoiced to penetrate to these uplands, as famed in sacred history as they are wild in themselves. In one of his journals Dr. Kitto thus speaks of the source of the Euphrates: "Close by Diadin (near Mount Ararat) flows a small stream of beautiful clear water, shallow, and easily stepped over. This is the *Euphrates*. I stood astride it a moment, and then passed over. I was never before so near the source of a mighty and famous river, and my thoughts were many. . . . The water seems to me more sweet than any I have ever tasted. It is something to have seen Ararat and the Euphrates in one day."

At some places not far from the river, beside its rising, there are forests of oak, pines, walnuts, and other trees. These are on the slopes of the mountains; and the valleys are compared to gardens for beauty and luxuriance. The vine, the fig, the almond, and the olive, are mentioned among the sources of wealth. The apple tree, the pear, the plum, and other trees, add alike to the riches and the beauty of the Euphrates. The lily

tribe, the orchis, and other plants, increase at seasons the bloom of the region; and majestic plane trees, with the lowlier wormwood, and other herbs, are enrolled in the list of forest grandeur or floral beauty. Indeed it were long to tell of the date palm, the tamarisk, the acacia, the asters, the water-lilies, the ranunculuses, and countless other plants, not omitting the characteristic willows, which fringe the River Euphrates. The water is so cold as to be chilly far up among the mountains; and the whole narrative of the productions of the banks, including the fig, the mulberry, the apricot, the almond, and other fruit-bearing trees, lends attractions to a scene which is surpassingly fair.*

But the animals which abound along the current of the Euphrates are as manifold as its flowers. The lion, the bear, the wolf, the lynx, the fox, the jackal, the leopard, the hyena, and a species of tiger, are all found there. Wild asses, gazelles, fallow deer, the jerboa, the camel, the goat, the sheep, the ox, and the horse, are tenants of the region. The vulture, the bustard, and many birds of prey, with others of beautiful plum-

* The following account of the margin of the Euphrates is given by P. H. Gosse: "The banks of the river, and the whole surface of the valley," he says, "are like a vast flower garden. Beds of poppies, scarlet and white; bugloss, borage, and larkspur, of the richest azure; white and blushing cistuses; anemones, with white, scarlet, and delicately pencilled petals; ranunculuses, campanulas, and a thousand other flowers with names unknown to us, display their beauties or diffuse their fragrance on every side. But chiefly the bulbous-rooted plants abound in the region;—wild tulips, white, red, and blue; yellow daffodils and jonquils; gladioluses; hyacinths of many species; cyclamens with drooping, blushing blossoms; and lilies of every gay hue, scarlet, orange, yellow, white, purple, shoot up their sword-like leaves, and expand their lovely corollas from the mossy turf, enamelling its surface like a gorgeous carpet."

age, and the nightingale for song, all frequent the country, and help to give life and loveliness to the Upper Mesopotamia, such as few from our western parts suppose to exist there.

Near its rise, the Euphrates divides Armenia from Cappadocia. Near Samosata it reaches the level country; and there begin some of the peculiar beauties of the region. Having forced its way through narrow defiles and over foaming cataracts, it begins below Bir to spread out into a broad, majestic river; and through its course of fifteen hundred miles—some say two thousand—it diffuses a measureless fertility over Mesopotamia, although the whole is often allowed to run to waste. Some have said that the Euphrates is at a few places a mile broad; but from two hundred to five hundred yards may be given as its width, though there are gorges where it is contracted to less than a third of that extent. It abounds in fish, and has for the most part a sluggish current where the turbid yellowish waters do not advance more than three miles in an hour. At some places the depth is about eight feet, though at others camels can ford it without difficulty. Islands studded with villages, Oriental vegetation, the remains of aqueducts constructed with a view to irrigation, and other features, diversify the scene, though occasionally it is monotonous and tame.

The margin of the Euphrates is strewn with Arab huts grouped into villages, and surrounded by herds of horses and cattle, with flocks of sheep and goats. But it is in its historical associations that this river is peculiarly rich. When it reaches the plains of Shinar

it rolls through scenes which were signalized when the world was so young that man scarcely had had time to become gray. They may now be bald and bare, but events have happened there with whose results the world is still too familiar. The river, it is well known, both watered and defended the great Babylon; and there are some branches of the Euphrates, or canals led off from it, which still traverse the scene where the proud city stood; and the scarry mounds, which now form the tomb or the monument of so much splendour, represent nearly all that remains of Babylon. The stratagem by which Cyrus got possession of the city is too well known to need description here; and in the fulness of time the desolation became complete. On the left bank of the river there are some large mounds, which are known to cover up fragments of Babylon—such fragments as broken pottery, decomposing bricks, and the bitumen peculiar to the region (as at the pits of Hit), can supply. The Mujelibé, a pile of ruins about 140 feet high, and said to be half a mile in circumference, forms a suitable land-mark to indicate the site of Babylon. The overturned but poor fragments of former grandeur which exist there appear like a lampoon upon the memory of him who set up the image on the adjacent plains of Dura, and made death the wages of disobedience to his decree of worship.

But it would scarcely be right to pass so lightly over the history of the “queen of kingdoms,” “the golden city,” the boast of Nebuchadnezzar, and the grave of Belshazzar. The river is about four hundred and thirty feet wide at Hillah, a fortified town of about

seven thousand inhabitants, which may be regarded as the modern representative of Babylon, and which there occupies both sides of the Euphrates. One looks round in vain for the city which is said to have been 60 miles in circuit, with walls 350 feet high, and 87 thick;—that is, as Gosse has remarked, about as high as St. Paul's Cathedral in London! It is with difficulty that we can credit the accounts which are given of such stupendous erections; but when we consider the prodigious power, the limitless resources, the grasping ambition, and the fiery will of some of the despots of Babylon, as well as some of the remains of their handiwork which have come down to us, our faith in the narrative is re-assured. Such power as that which reared the Great Pyramid might construct the walls of Babylon.

And who shall tell—we cannot pretend even to enumerate—the inner glories of the place? A hundred gates of brass; fifty streets connecting each pair of gates at the opposite extremities of the city, and so traversing the whole interior; with palaces, store-houses, towers, and castles, such as the capital of Babylonia required, made up a spectacle which, it is believed, surpassed our most boasted cities in magnitude, if not in taste of decoration. A stone bridge spanned the river, which was about a quarter of a mile in breadth. In short, everything was there that could betoken the grand conceptions and the colossal powers of execution of those old-world despots.

Among the palaces there is one in a high state of preservation—the Kasr—which deserves to be noticed. It

is composed of thick walls built of fine bricks, and buttressed as if it had been designed to outlast all time. The cement which binds the stones together is still so strong that the mass seems compact and solid ; it is with difficulty that a single brick can be detached ;—and all that, after the lapse of three or four thousand years !

Again, about six miles distant, on the right bank of the river, stands the Birs Nimroud, a singular pile, long supposed to occupy the site of the Tower of Babel, the origin, and for ages deemed the glory, of Babylon. Lions, hyenas, and jackals, now prowl where the proudest of princes once ruled ; but that need not prevent us from glancing at the “ heap,” which inspires all who visit it with awe, and which, by association at least, carries us back to the young years of our world. Its circuit is about 2286 feet, and its height is about 200 feet. From top to base it is a huge and formless mass, somewhat resembling a mound with a ruined fort on its summit. The Turks digging for hidden treasures (their favourite pursuit), the neighbouring Arabs quarrying for building materials, the tempest and rain tracing long furrows down the pile, and the curious searching for antiquities, have so completely defaced the whole, that confusion now reigns, where vice, luxury, and gross ungodliness long held court and carnival. The gray osiers still waving heavily beside the river form a fitting cincture for a scene so solemn.

It has, as we have said, long been supposed that the Birs Nimroud occupies the position and is the modern representative of the Tower of Babel, and some of the most intelligent of explorers have favoured that im-

pression. In the year 1854, however, some excavations were made which have modified the opinions previously held. It seems now definitively ascertained that the structure consisted of six different stages or terraces. Each terrace was about twenty feet high and forty feet narrower than that just below it. Together they formed a pyramid; and upon the summit stood a vitrified mass, which is supposed to have been the sanctum of this temple. It is ascertained—at least some hold it to be so—that this pile was dedicated to the planet gods, each storey to a planet; and though it is not the veritable Tower of Babel, it is understood to be built upon the same model, insomuch that “when we look upon the existing edifice we regard a fac-simile of the one that is now destroyed.”*

But even though this be not the very tower, the site and the history of the place bring us into contact with the memorials of an event which dates from soon after the Flood, and which has exercised an unspeakable influence upon all succeeding ages. It was there that the pride of man culminated,—there that he sought to make himself a name, but only made sure of disgrace. In frustrating an ambitious project to build a tower to heaven—that is, of exceeding height—and in confounding man’s speech, the Almighty and the Holy One so asserted his prerogative that the world has felt the effects from that day to this. Indeed no case could be selected more clearly illustrative of the descending consequences of sin. Let us leave out of view the Western tongues, manifold and diverse though they be. Let

* Loftus, “Chaldæa and Susiana.”

us think only of one section of the globe, Hindustan, —and how surely has the reign of darkness been there deepened and prolonged by what happened at Babel ! Count over the discrepant languages spoken from Cape Comorin in the south to the Himalayas on the north— from the Bay of Bengal on the east to Hyderabad on the west ;—view each one of them as another and another barrier reared in the way of the missionary with God's truth in his hand, or of true civilization with its refinements. Or think of the Cingalese, the language of Ceylon. It has one dialect for the rich and another for the poor. The former is signalized by fulsome adulation and thoroughly Oriental hyperbole ; the latter by rude, harsh epithets : so that the translation of the word of God into the one or the other of these dialects has disguised its spirit and rendered it the occasion of deeper animosity than ever. Consider such things, and then see how profoundly the world, were it wise, would deplore the miserable ambition of the plains of Shinar. The Birs Nimroud is a monument that has survived the waste of three or four thousand years, to tell how deplorable and deep are the ravages of sin, and how man forsakes his own mercies by forsaking his God.

And retribution came upon Babylon at length. Her kings had done their utmost in iniquity. The last of them had desecrated the sacred vessels taken from the Temple of Jerusalem, and in his wantonness employed them to adorn his revelry or stimulate his debauch. The minions of a court, companions in sins which should not once be named, aided their king in mocking Him who never yet has been mocked with impunity. His people

had long been prisoners at Babylon, and had wept there over the desolations of their home—the mournful captives pined, but in vain, for their temple, their city, their land, and the favour of their God. But the day of retribution came, and Belshazzar's impious feast filled the cup of iniquity to the brim: it ran over. "Bel bows down:" and the haughty monarch must away to the sides of the pit where his predecessors wait for his arrival, and welcome him with bitterness or scorn, (Isa. xiv.) In a night Babylon becomes a heap. After a siege of two years Cyrus takes it, sacks it, and the king and his princes are put to the sword. Their stores of provision, calculated to last for twenty years, and all their munitions, become like flax before the flame; for the set time of doom has come,—crime has produced its natural, its inevitable results. Belshazzar's sin has found him out, and the besom of destruction sweeps him and his city from their place. The artificial lake formed by a former king, and resembling in its magnitude all other Babylonish things—Babylonish towers, Babylonish walls, the Babylonish empire, and Babylonish guilt—for it is said to have been a square of fifty miles on each side, and thirty-five feet deep, became a reservoir for the waters of the river, which were diverted thither by Cyrus. The very means to which Belshazzar trusted for safety became his ruin. His house fell, and great was the fall.

It was reserved for Darius, the successor of Cyrus, to expedite the decay of Babylon. He carried away the hundred gates of brass, and the city which had rebelled against him was given up to plunder. Alexander the Great advanced the work of desolation still further,

though at one time he dreamt of making Babylon the capital of a world-wide empire. When Seleucus built the city of Seleucia on the Tigris, Babylon became a quarry for the erection, and many of its people were deported. The adjacent country was laid under water by the breaking down of dams and embankments. The region became unwholesome, and though its prodigious buildings long resisted the progress of decay, the place was literally a possession for the bittern and pools of water. Serpents and scorpions became its chief inhabitants, and those who have wandered the farthest over the earth are the loudest to proclaim, that of all gloomy spectacles Babylon ranks perhaps as the first. At one time, the Parthian kings made the site of the city a park for wild beasts. To this day the lion is occasionally seen amid its funereal solitudes. Once more God is true, and every man a liar. "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces." There are offensive reptiles among the ruins, and those who have set before us the evidence of God's word from the fulfilment of prophecy, find no more prolific topic than the dreary desolation and the mounds on the plains of Shinar. The Birs Nimroud, the Kasr, the Mujelibe, and other colossal remains, are all witnesses for God; and what

constituted the strength of Babylon—its river—both helped to destroy it and to perpetuate its destruction.

The ruins of Babylon thus connect us with the right hand of the Almighty as surely as the sun and the stars.

“ Every one,
From the slight asteroid to the vast orb,
That lists thy watchword, or the music march
Of farthest planets round their monarch suns,
Marshallled in glorious order, leads our souls
From system unto system up to Thee ; ”

and the dreary mounds on the banks of the Euphrates do the same. The believer waxes more confident, and seems to be better prepared for the great fight of afflictions, when he sees so plainly that his God reigneth.

Wandering amid these dreary monuments of decay often saddens and depresses. It is like walking in a grave-yard where memorial after memorial appears, each sounding out some dirge of the past. But the truth which came from heaven takes us, when most dejected, by the hand ; it bids us look through the dark portals of the grave to the bright eternity which greets the believer beyond it. Babylon, once a majestic queen among the nations, the impersonation of all that was gorgeous or magnificent in earthly things, may be a dismantled, shapeless ruin now ; but the city of our God is a joy for ever. The Euphrates, once a boundary of Eden, may have beheld, or may be still beholding, much that is revolting on its margin ; but is not the river of life, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, to roll through eternity ! The voice of all, then, is “ Excelsior ; ” and he that has ears to hear will seek a heart to obey ; obeying, he will be blessed.

When the Euphrates leaves the plains of Babylon it hastens to receive the Tigris and proceed as one flood with it—the Shat el Arab—to fall into the Persian Gulf. Irrigation becomes somewhat common along its course ; date trees line the river and embower the hamlets, although the level banks and the flatness of the country at some places allow the adjacent districts to be laid under water or turned into noxious swamps. One section which is thus perverted from every useful purpose is said to be no less than sixty miles in width,—so level are those dreary yet magnificent plains. It is after passing the town of Suk el Shuyukh that the Euphrates receives the waters of the Tigris at a place called Korna, to be noticed in the next section ; and Bassorah, with a population of twenty thousand, is the chief city on the united stream. Near its entrance to the sea the Euphrates is from twenty to thirty feet deep, while its width is estimated by some at nearly one thousand yards. It is navigable for about one hundred and forty miles from its embouchure for such craft as the natives on its margin employ ; but it is well known that British enterprise has attempted to make its waters available to a much greater extent. To find a ready pathway to our Eastern possessions, the valley of the Euphrates has been a favourite route with many. Colonel Chesney, with immense toil, and at no little loss, explored both the Tigris and the Euphrates ; but futurity must decide how far the results of his investigations can be made available for the purposes which he so ardently cherished. We need not fear, however, that such facilities as the Euphrates affords

will lie always unheeded. Recent explorings tell us that the river was navigated by Chesney for eleven hundred and seventeen miles above its estuary. Five years thereafter, or in 1841, another examination was made; the river was navigated for ten hundred and thirty miles above its mouth, and the chief obstacles encountered were the buildings connected with the wheels for irrigation. In the short space of one hundred and thirty miles, no fewer than three hundred of these erections were found. By this expedition the Euphrates was declared to be navigable to Baulus, and the Tigris to Mosul.

When we glance over the records of the past, one portion of their intelligence seems to indicate that the Euphrates may be made more subservient to the aims of Britain than has hitherto been realized. Julian the Apostate had eleven hundred vessels afloat at one time upon the stream; and surely it may be inferred that this Tiber of the East may yet be employed more largely than it has hitherto been in carrying out the purposes of Him who turns dry land into water-pools. If Babylon once contained the Hanging Gardens, the Tower of Belus, so called, and stores of gold valued at more than twenty millions sterling, with other marvels, all now so utterly ruined that "dragons cry in her pleasant palaces," let us hope that the glory of the river has not departed for ever—that other sights of beauty will yet be seen in the fulness of time on the banks of the Euphrates.

And yet it needs nothing more than the past supplies to illustrate its waters. Up near the mountains from which the river descends, and where winter and summer very nearly meet—the snow in the uplands being deep

and frozen into all but ice, while the heat of summer in the valleys raises the thermometer in the shade as high as 120° by day and 110° at night—the Father of the Faithful found both a cradle and a place of sojourn. Padan-aram has not yet been definitively identified; yet some are of opinion that both Ur and Charran are now known, and lie on the eastern margin of the stream, below Samosata. In Abraham's early days idolatry reigned in those regions, as in the wide world beside; but he who was chosen to revive and perpetuate the knowledge of the living God was called thence, and went out at that God's command, "not knowing whither he went." Terah his father and Nahor his brother were left behind at that high bidding which made Abraham a wandering exile for the rest of his mortal life; and it was thus that the word of God became that man's inheritance, the will of God his law. "Get thee out of thy country" was the test. By the grace of God Abraham stood the test; and as the Euphrates rises from a little fountain, but hastens to become a flood—"the river," by pre-eminence,—that act of Abraham may be said to have been the seed-germ of all true faith in the Eternal from that day to this. The power which wrought and was submitted to in yon upland village Ur, or Charran, has spread throughout all ages and all lands. At this hour it is deeper than it ever was,—it is deepening every day; and what mortal power can either fathom its depth or gage its potency? By setting to his seal that God was true, and by becoming a homeless wanderer, living upon a promise, Abraham became the most remarkable of the

sons of men, considering his age and country. He is a model at once for faith and for boldness—"the father of the faithful"—"the friend of God"—one in whom grace gloriously triumphed, and things seen and temporal were as gloriously postponed to the things which are unseen and eternal. In a word, by the upland margin of the Euphrates lessons were divinely taught and well learned, on which the felicities both of time and eternity are made by God most high to depend.

Nor that alone. When Abraham sent his steward, Eliezer, to seek a wife for the patriarch's son from among his forefathers, new marvels occurred, and fresh light was shed upon the faith and the usages of those times. Rebekah became the daughter-in-law of Abraham, and that in a manner which prompts the confession, "Surely this is the finger of God."

And as Abraham near the rise of the Euphrates, so Daniel not far from its terminus, was signally favoured of God. The captive Jews had long hung their harps on the willows which fringed the flood, and wept when they remembered Zion,—its dreary desolations, and its chains. Yet there was among them one whom not merely an earthly king delighted to honour, but, moreover, the King of kings,—Daniel, "the man greatly beloved." Prophecies were uttered by him, and fulfilled by God upon the banks of the Euphrates, which are still confirming the faith of believers. From the spot whence man had sent forth an influence noxious as mildew over all generations, God sent forth his messages to counteract man's machinations. In brief, under the very shadow of the walls of Babylon Jehovah

reared new bulwarks to the Christian faith. The Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans became just what God said they would be; and while Belshazzar's predicted downfall and sudden doom encouraged the people of God in that age to fear God and have no other fear, the other predictions of the Book of Daniel stand forth, in their historical fulfilments, to strengthen and establish all who have learned to stay themselves on the most high God.

But the name of at least one other prophet is associated with this region. Along the elevated bank of a marsh in the vicinity of Babylon, and at the distance of about twelve miles due south from the Birs Nimroud, the traveller reaches the little town of Keffil. It is a dilapidated place surrounded by a high wall; and, except at the time of an annual pilgrim festival, it is a dreary abode. But among the buildings which overtop the wall, a tomb, said to be that of Ezekiel, is one. It has the appearance of an elongated cone, approaching to a spire, tapering to the top by a succession of steps, and is embellished in a peculiar manner. Some who have explored the region are not unwilling to accept the tradition as true. The fixity of Oriental names and habits supplies a reason for their opinion. The tradition is certainly many centuries old; and though superstition, with its ever-burning lamps and tawdry decorations, mars the aspect of the spot, it is pleasant to think that this may be the resting-place of him who beheld the brightest of visions, who "had a pleasant voice, and could play well upon an instrument." The tomb is said to contain an ancient Hebrew

THE CONFLUENCE OF THE TIGRIS WITH THE EUPHRATES.



copy of the Pentateuch, built into the wall ; but one is unwilling to listen to any idle legends in such a place, lest they should diminish the amount of credit given to the tradition that this is the Tomb of Ezekiel.

The drying up of the Euphrates, predicted in Rev. xvi. 12, is an event regarding which a wide diversity of opinion exists ; but this is not the place to enucleate the difficulty. It refers, by general consent, to the overthrow of the Mohammedan power in the East, and the consequent freedom of the nations to proclaim and to welcome Him who is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life." And no one who ponders the past, with the true light for his guide, can doubt that that process has been going on for centuries. The Euphrates becomes drier from year to year ; and in our own day events which point in that direction are receiving a rapid, often a bloody development. But whatever doubt may surround the questions which arise out of the prediction, this much is certain,—“All the purposes of God shall stand.” “He will do all his pleasure ;” and when the set time has come, a mighty Gulf Stream of truth will roll round the world, at once to unite and fertilize, making what is arctic genial, what is barren fruitful, what is polluted pure.

2. THE TIGRIS, ITS CONFLUENCE WITH THE EUPHRATES.

There is scarcely any doubt that the Tigris is the Hiddekel of Scripture (Gen. ii. 14 ; Dan. x. 4). If the

etymologists be right, each of these names means a *rapid stream*, or a stream like an arrow; and as such a title is descriptive of the river, it helps in some slight degree to decide that the Tigris and the Hiddekel are one.

It rises in the mountains of Armenia, at a place not more than fifteen miles south from the sources of the Euphrates, and its course is about twelve hundred miles in length. It flows in a south-easterly direction, at some places fringed with gardens and fertile plains. At Deirbeker, a town of about thirty thousand inhabitants, the Tigris is about two hundred and fifty yards wide. It falls into the larger Euphrates at Korna, about fifty miles above Bassorah. The once renowned Bagdad stands upon its banks. Seleucia, as we have seen, was built upon it by King Seleucus, very much out of the ruins of Babylon. Shushan, the city where Esther was raised to a throne, and honoured to do her great work, is at some distance to the east; but the glory of the Tigris is Nineveh, and there the chief interests of the region for many centuries were found to cluster. The river can be navigated by vessels of twenty or thirty tons, but only for a short distance, and rafts are employed for carrying on the traffic between Mosul, which is just opposite to Nineveh, where the river is about two hundred feet wide, and the lower parts adjacent to the stream.

At the distance of several miles below Nineveh the Tigris receives from the high lands towards the east, first the greater Zab, and then the lesser. There are some mountains in that region through which the stream has to force its way; and about eighty miles

below old Nineveh it is said to be five hundred yards in breadth. On the west bank are the ruins of an ancient city, or rather some mounds, supposed to represent Calah, mentioned in Gen. x. 11. Farther down, the Tigris and the Euphrates run nearly parallel, and at a point near Bagdad the distance which severs them is not more than fourteen miles; and though the canal of Seleucia, which unites the two rivers, is forty-five miles long, it neither crosses the plain at the narrowest point nor in a straight direction. It is apparent that in ancient times, when this region *was* a country, there were several canals required by the demands of commerce, but these are now in ruins or not used; and though the Tigris is here augmented by the junction of another river from the east, which is said to be four hundred yards broad, the country is still in great measure a waste.

Between Bagdad, the city of the Caliphs, and the junction of the Tigris with the Euphrates—a distance of about three hundred and fifty miles—the former is on an average about two hundred yards wide, and rises twice each year, namely, in April and November. At some parts the banks of the Tigris are steep, and the jungle which covers them affords covert for lions and the other wild beasts of the district. Ruined fortresses, mounds, and dams still remain to attest the former greatness of the powers which had their seats in succession upon these banks; but here, as elsewhere in these regions, the glory has departed, and the Euphrates and the Tigris, connected as they are by rising almost from the same fountains in the same mountain range, as well as

by canals on their course, are yet more closely connected by a community of greatness, of past disaster, and present desolation.

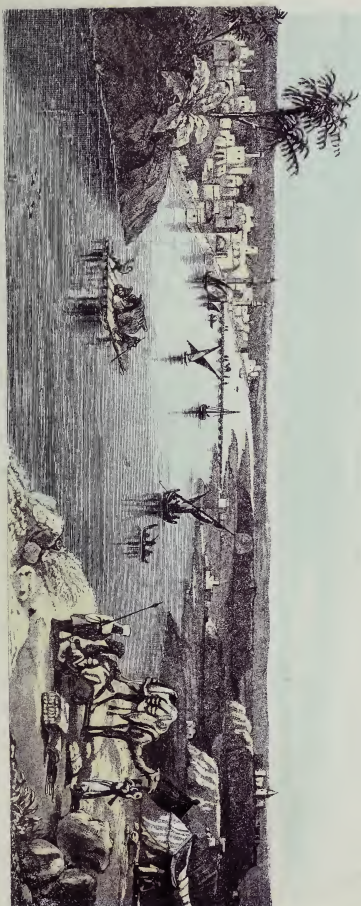
It may be right, however, to glance at the history of Nineveh, the city of Ninus, situated on the east bank of the river. He founded other cities in this region besides this capital. The ruins of these, it is believed, have lately been discovered; and if so, they carry us back to the early youth of the human race. At Nineveh Ninus and Semiramis ruled; but their doings cannot be distinctly traced, so dim, or so like twilight, were the times in which they lived. Their glory has been all entombed for thousands of years, while it has been reserved for strangers, from empires which were not founded for many centuries after Nineveh had waned into decay, to decipher its hieroglyphic history, and tell us, in shreds and patches, of the grandeur or the shame of the "mighty hunter" and his successors.

The Scriptures give us only brief, though they are most suggestive, hints regarding Nineveh; but from other sources we learn that its walls were about one hundred and fifty feet high and fifty feet thick. Its high towers for defence, fifteen hundred in number and two hundred feet in height, were prodigies even in those times of colossal building, and even these were overtopped by still loftier pyramidal towers. The walls were twenty miles in length and ten miles in breadth. The city was consequently sixty miles in circuit, and covered a space of two hundred square miles,—“an exceeding great city, of three days' journey,”—so great as to suggest the incredulous question, Is the narrative the

Nosul

Mound of Konyuyik

Tomb of Jonah



THE TIGRIS AT NINEVEH.



fiction of a dream, or is it really an account of well-authenticated facts?

But what was all this imposing array of strength when Jehovah arose to shake the nations? It was like stubble before the blaze. The idolatry of Nineveh was an abomination in his sight, and it must fall, oppressed by the weight of its own corruptions. The high-handed crime which rioted there may be illustrated by a single example. When Nineveh was besieged by the Medes under Arbaces, and on the eve of being sacked, about the year 746 B.C., the effeminate voluptuary Sardanapalus, who was then king, could neither defend his capital against the rebels nor brook falling into their hands. Influenced by a tradition or an oracle which said that Nineveh would fall when the Tigris became its enemy, he gave himself up to despair during a remarkable flood in the river. Determined, however, not to grace the triumph of a revolted vassal, he constructed a huge funeral pile within his palace, and placed all his wealth upon it. His harem and all that was deemed precious to an imperial Oriental voluptuary were next placed upon the pile. He then mounted it himself, and caused it to be set on fire; and he and all his perished in the blaze. The enemy soon became masters of the city; and as Nahum had pictorially predicted (i. 10), "while they were folded together as thorns, they were devoured as stubble fully dry." The same prophet promised the conqueror of Nineveh abundance of gold and silver (ii. 9); and profane history corroborates the prediction in regard to this proud capital. Ecbatana, which lies to

the north-east, was enriched by the spoils of Nineveh when the decree went forth that it should be utterly swept away ; and the doom of Sardanapalus perishing in a conflagration kindled by his own hand sheds a lurid light upon the degraded condition of the place, which a century or two before had repented at the preaching of Jonah. It is, at the same time, just a fac-simile of the self-inflicted doom of myriads ; for how are many employed but in rearing or igniting their own funeral pile ? Nineveh, then, fell as the Lord of all had predicted. Cyaxares and Nabopolassar united the forces of Media and of Babylon against it, and by the combined armies it was swept away. It perhaps became a quarry for other cities. At last so utter was the oblivion into which it sank, that, after long centuries, men could only conjecture where it had stood !

It would be wrong, however, to pass over the prophet Jonah here with the slight allusion which has just been made to him. About the year 900 B.C. Jonah was commissioned to preach to Nineveh ; and it repented. The banks of the Tigris, and the palaces and streets which stretched in endless vista along its eastern margin, resounded to the simple but grand and imposing denunciation of that man of God : “ Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown ! ” His position when sent on his embassy thither was one of the most trying in which man was ever placed, and Jonah did not stand the test. That the millions dwelling in luxury in that proud capital, and pursuing pleasure with all the zeal of a martyr, would listen to the voice of a sorry and a solitary stranger, appeared

to the prophet a romantic and incredible expectation. Flesh and blood repudiated the thought that any words of warning, though uttered in thunder, would long or at all arrest that throng, immersed in business, engrossed with the pomp and circumstance of war, or drenched in the pleasures which follow in the train of wealth. For a time the embassy seemed foolishness to Jonah, and he would not go to Nineveh: he would rather try to "flee from the presence" of the Omnipresent,—and the world knows what befell the prophet in his flight.

Schooled, however, into obedience, Jonah at length delivered the brief but heavenly message; and when he did resort to that mighty city, hundreds of miles from his home, we can understand how his heart would faint at the sight of its gorgeous wealth, its prodigious strength, and its swarming myriads. Many who have blamed the peevish prophet, never fairly pondered the difficulties which he had to meet. Nobles in their pomp; lovers of pleasure in their heartless, hot pursuit; the devotees of wealth; the slave and the enslaver;—all were by nature and practice pledged to oppose the servant of God. The very sculptures which now reveal the pursuits of the Ninevites of old, enable us better to understand what he had to face. The warrior's revenge; the hunter's excitement, his peril, and his trophies; the painted chambers and the alabaster walls, adorned with scenes which even modern art cannot but applaud;—all disclose the deep-seated ungodliness, the ingrained hostility to what was pure and heavenly, which Jonah had to face.

Yet he faced it. He took up the heavenly message, he delivered it, and was honoured in his deed. Weary, perhaps, and worn out, like Him who sat on Jacob's well, that prophet reached the capital of Assyria; and forthwith its streets and squares and palaces rang with the dirge-like cry, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" The word was God's; it was the preaching which he commanded (Jonah iii. 2); and he honoured his own ordinance. From the monarch to the menial, men repented. Many might at first look with contempt upon the bold intruder; his monotonous proclamation might be a topic for mirth to the frivolous, or of scoffing to the openly impious: but gradually that subduing power was felt, which proved that God only wise was with Jonah indeed; and the myriads of Nineveh bowed before the truth of God, as the willow or the sedge by the river bent that day before the breeze.

Now, among many truths which we may learn from Jonah's work at Nineveh, this is one:—See how cities are to be reformed; how the degraded are to be elevated; how the ungodly are at least to be awed. Not by mere human devices; not by mere culture for the mind or mere care for the body; but, before and above all, by the truth of God proclaimed on the one hand, and believed on the other. That is the divine panacea, the infallible specific; and they who employ it in faith will prosper in their measure, as Jonah did at last. It is on the word of God believed that the eternity of man is thus made to depend.

Long after the days of Jonah, Nineveh and the Tigris

witnessed the triumphs and the honours of another prophet. It was there that Daniel saw in vision the roll of the future opened up, and had the knowledge of the Omniscient imparted to him. There also, in times long subsequent to those of Daniel, did the fiery Tamerlane and his invading hordes pile up on one occasion ninety thousand human heads, as a trophy to his desolating power. And in our own day Nineveh and the Tigris have once more become like household words. The excavations which have been made there; the monuments disinterred; the corroborations of heavenly truth discovered; the helmets, the coats of mail, or fragments of them; the sphinxes, the winged bulls, and the countless proofs of the pride and pomp of Nineveh;—all lead us away back to the banks of the Tigris, and to scriptural times. In a sense, they make the world three thousand years younger; at least they help to carry us far back into the dimness of the past. The Jews had been permitted to return to Jerusalem by Cyrus. Daniel was intent on seeing them restored, though he was tottering now on the verge of the eternal world; and it was when aiming at that result that the seer was favoured with some of his visions: he learned to call things that were not as though they had been. But that did not retard the downfall of Nineveh. After the days of Jonah, it relapsed into its former crimes, and the end came. Rude mounds and crumbling piles took the places of the palaces of that gorgeous city; and it is the opening of those mounds—the disinterring of those ruins from a grave three thousand years old—that forms one of the most signal events of our age: for

who does not see the wisdom of God in raising up *now* and *there* such witnesses for his truth as those ruins contain?—*now*, when infidelity is passing into new phases, and doing its utmost in new forms to prove the truth to be a lie; and *there*, where neither fraud nor forgery can be so much as suspected. Some portions of the Bible have been twice given on the banks of the Tigris. First, prophecies were there uttered; and secondly, they have been fulfilled—fulfilled through every jot and tittle—nay, fulfilled once, and re-fulfilled once more.

One instance in illustration may suffice. Scepticism has long questioned the truth of the record regarding the magnitude of Nineveh. “A city of three days’ journey,” understood to mean about sixty miles in circumference, was long deemed, at the best, a mere Oriental hyperbole. But the discovery of the four mounds, Khorsabad and Kouyunjik, Nimroud and Karasules—indicating, it is believed, nearly the four corners of the leviathan city, and covering a space just about sixty miles in circumference—seems at once to confirm the prophet’s words, and to assure us once more that among credulous things infidelity is not the least credulous. Kouyunjik, on the east bank, opposite Mosul; Nimroud, about eighteen miles farther down the Tigris; with Khorsabad, at a considerable distance from the other two, are alleged to represent so many corners of Nineveh. The whole neighbourhood along the banks for many miles is strewn with fragments of brick, pottery, and similar materials, proclaiming at once the former extent and the present desolation of the place.

Yet, amid this desolation, it would not be too much to say that we have materials now for restoring or reproducing the palaces of Nineveh. The architecture of the Ninevites, their mural decorations, their paintings, their statuary, their records, their superstitions, their household implements, their personal ornaments, their domestic habits, their business, and their pleasures, could all be represented from the fragments or the masses which survive; and as Jonah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, all uttered the truths of God in that region, their utterances have been literally fulfilled. "This is the finger of God," is the glad acknowledgment of the friends of revelation—the constrained confession of those who resist it; and we need seek no better armour in which to contend for truth, in some of its aspects, than the banks of the Tigris and the excavations of Nineveh supply. True, we have the highest of all authority for saying that some will not believe though one were to rise from the dead. That has been very nearly done at Nineveh; and though they who are unbelieving may be unbelieving still, "What hath God wrought!" may well express the satisfaction of the friends of revelation, whose words so aptly describe the condition of Nineveh while it stood in its pride: "He will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it; their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work. This

is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand" (Zeph. ii. 13-15).

Upon one of the mounds on the left bank of the river there stands a monument to the prophet Jonah, which is reputed his tomb. The Mohammedans, it is well known, reverence the prophets of the Old Testament, and, in a sense, the Redeemer himself, in as far as he was a mere prophet. Among the rest, Jonah is signalized as having been connected with Nineveh; and the monument here referred to is the result. It stands above the buried glories of the fallen city, as if the prophet might rejoice, even in the grave, over the prostration of that place whose respite provoked his peevishness, and made him wish to die. The whole vicinity is eminently a suggestive one, and speaks to us, in language more eloquent than man's, of the misery which follows the extinction of heavenly light.

"The wretch who slights the bounty of the skies,
And sinks while favoured with the means to rise,"

became the model of Nineveh, as these scarred and shapeless mounds have long been her burial-place.

It should be borne in mind, however, that there is another tomb and monument to Jonah at Jiyeh, on the shores of the Mediterranean. Moslems and Druses resort to it as to a shrine, to obtain relief from sorrow or deliverance from threatening ills. The popular belief

is, that at the spot where the monument stands the prophet was cast ashore; and though tradition may have caricatured the truth, there are fragments of revelation floating about those Oriental lands which may be blessed to lead some to salvation. Thirdly, another tomb of Jonah exists at El-Mesh-had, near Sefurieh, the ancient Sepphoris. El-Mesh-had is believed by some to be the modern representative of Gath-hepher, the prophet's birth-place.

Further: little has as yet been said regarding the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates. That takes place, as already mentioned, at Korna, which is about a hundred miles above the place where the Shat el Arab enters the Persian Gulf; and the view of the two rivers at their confluence is calmly grand, though the country for the most part is flat and monotonous. But the chief attraction, or at least that which will absorb all others, is the fact that this has been supposed by some to be the region where paradise was situated. One so calm and judicious and untheoretical as Calvin leant to this opinion; and according to him the Euphrates and the Hiddekel or Tigris, here combining, still indicate two of the boundaries of man's first home—that Eden, or “delights,” which God only good and only wise assigned to the first man for his home—his earthly heaven. But the wildness and extravagance of the theories formed upon this subject warn us to be cautious in forming any decided judgment regarding it. The most judicious inquirer, we apprehend, will be the most ready to confess that the site of paradise is not known, and is not likely ever to be. Far from sup-

posing that the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates indicates the spot where Eden was, we give the following as some of the views of learned men upon the subject :—

The two rivers just mentioned are generally believed to be identified, but the Pison and the Gihon are unknown ; and hence endless conjecture or amusing puerilities. From east to west, from north to south, and round the world, men have searched for Eden ; and coming to details, some place it at the confluence of the Euphrates and the Tigris, and find the Pison and the Gihon in some specified portion of these rivers ; others remove it to the mountains of Armenia, where plenty of streams can be found for their purpose. Philo allegorized the narrative, and supposed that paradise shadows forth the governing faculty of the soul, and he bent all details to fit in with this dream. For example, the four rivers are cardinal virtues, and so in other points. Origen, again, imagined paradise to be heaven, and the trees to be angels ; and such mystical interpretations had previously been high in favour with some of the men called “ apostolic fathers.” Ambrose made paradise Paul’s third heaven, and allegorized the whole history. Some of the Jews place paradise somewhere between earth and heaven ; others say that it was on a mountain which reached nearly to the moon ; and others, that it was somewhere above the earth, just high enough to escape from the waters of the Deluge. One class imagines the existence of a twofold paradise, —the one material, the other spiritual ; another holds that the whole earth was a paradise. Some allege that

it was only thirty or forty miles in circumference; and others that it included Syria, Arabia, and Mesopotamia.

Again: the great Gulf Stream has been reckoned the river that went forth from Eden, while others are satisfied with the Shat el Arab. The Caspian Sea is the river, according to some bold men. And once more, while some concede the Euphrates and the Tigris to be two out of the four streams, they find the Pison or the Gihon in the Nile. Others again find the Pison in the Ganges; others allege that the Indus has a title to that honour; others advance the claims of the Hydaspes; others uphold the title of the river called Landi-Sindh; while others, retiring to Europe, plead for the Danube. Others still, outraging geography as well as common sense, argue that the Pison was the Ganges, and the Indus, and that it fell into the sea near Cadiz. Huet, arguing against Calvin and Scaliger, holds that the Pison was the western channel (there are two) by which the Euphrates and the Tigris united enter the Persian Gulf. Though it seems as if there were to be no end of our catalogue, it should be added that some identify the Pison with the Phasis which rises near Mount Ararat,—and names so learned as those of Reland, Calmet, and Rosenmuller, are quoted in defence of that river. Leclerc, again, held that the Chrysorrhoas or the Barada was the Pison; while another speculator seeks, and of course finds it in the Irrawaddy of the kingdom of Ava. Mendelssohn points to a river in Hyrcania as the Pison; while Colonel Chesney selects the Halys and Araxes as the Pison and the Gihon.

Equally multifarious are the attempts of learned men to find the land of Havilah. The regions south-east of Palestine; the east or the south of Arabia; the Valley of the Ganges; the Vale of Cashmir; Susiana; Ava; the Ural Mountains; Colchis, the region of the Golden Fleece; Coele-Syria; the coasts of the Baltic; Scandinavia; even Siberia—all have their upholders.

Then, as the theories about the Pison were countless, the Gihon has occasioned no less difficulty. The Nile is reckoned the Gihon by some; the Oxus is preferred by a learned phalanx; the Araxes, by some not less learned; the eastern branch of the Shat el Arab, say some; the western, retort others. The Orontes, the Ganges, the Kur or Cyrus, all have their partisans, who plead for them as the Gihon. The Diyalah, a tributary of the Tigris, is pleaded for by some; and the whole affair of Eden, and of its rivers with it, is referred to the Mountains of the Moon by not a few. The Niger is also implicated in the inquiry, and grave arguments by a very learned man are urged on its behalf. Perhaps it may be accepted as an argument to confront some of these speculations, that those who find the rise of the rivers in the Mountains of the Moon, allege that they run under ground till they reach Assyria, and there emerge. Akin to this is the dream which discovers the fountain of the rivers in some lofty region, where they are instantly absorbed till, rolling on below sea and earth, they appear at the proper place.

But it is needless to continue this enumeration, though the Cush mentioned in the description of Eden

be as fertile in diversity as the other names. Manifest it is that the site of paradise is now hopelessly unknown; and Luther was probably correct, though he was not critical in the German sense, when he alleged that the boundaries and land-marks were all washed away by the Deluge. For the rest, the only point regarding which any measure of certainty is attainable is, that the Euphrates and the Tigris were connected with Eden. By means of them we are brought, in some vague sense, to the proximity of the blessed spot. And there are places in the region where the garden can easily be reproduced. Imagine that there were no sin to taint or distemper, no floods to inundate, no tempests to overthrow, no earthquakes to upheave. The heavens supply just enough of sunshine, and the earth and the sky together just enough of moisture, to keep all green and goodly. Then along these rivers, for example at Korna, where they meet, Eden might indeed be restored;—that vicinity has appeared to some no unmeet scene in which to place the garden which Jehovah planted, and sinless man was appointed to keep and to dress. We assert nothing on the subject,—assertions have been too numerous already,—and agree with those who class the discovery of Eden side by side with the quadrature of the circle and similar problems. Yet that conceded, it may be said that the region which is watered by the Euphrates and the Tigris, especially near their confluence, is one which *might* have been a paradise, before sin had deflowered at once Eden and the globe. With the Bible in our hand, Eden there becomes, in some degree, a more palpable reality.

Now, if there be any truth in such glimpses, then we may be *not very far* from the spot where innocence once dwelt. From man, the delegated lord of all, down to the lower animals, through all their ranks, harmony reigned. There was, literally, peace on earth. The moral and material were then in unison with the mind of the Supreme; and because he was obeyed the world was serenely happy.

But just here there meets us one solemn, stern reality, about which there can be no doubt and no discussion—Sin, the violator of the world's peace, the grave of the world's hopes, the fountain of untold woes. Men marvel at the sin which turned our world into a graveyard, and our race into its tenants. Some laugh at it as little, or scoff at it as ridiculous. But he who understands the sinfulness of sin, and remembers the position in which man stood in Eden, will form a different and a sounder estimate; and a bare enumeration of the component parts of the first transgression suffices to explain why "the wages of sin is death,"—why the holy God could not allow it to pass unpunished, and that to the uttermost.

Is it a sin to make God a liar? The first transgression attempted to do that.

Is rebellion against the King Eternal a sin? Then Adam was guilty.

Is idolatry, or preferring the creature to God, a sin? Then Adam was guilty again.

Is it base to be ungrateful when we are loaded with favour after favour? Adam was exceedingly ungrateful.

Is it sinful to betray a trust? Adam did so.

Is pride criminal? Then we know that Adam grasped at the thought of aggrandizement.

Is it debasing to permit bodily indulgence to be ascendant in the soul? Then Adam was morally debased.

All these, and other forms of transgression, were wrapt up in the first sin, like the oak in the acorn. With all these the first man is indubitably chargeable. The authority of God, the beauties of Eden, the responsibilities of a most solemn trust, were all set aside when man consented to sin, and fell.

But if the waters of the Tigris tell of the first Adam, those of the Jordan have already told us of the second, the Lord from heaven. Promised in Eden, he came in the fulness of time,—a Redeemer to the enslaved,—life to the legally dead,—God to those who had lost Him, and peace to those whose portion had become one of tribulation and of woe. If this Tigris be the very river mentioned in connection with Eden, then somewhere on its banks the first accents of grace were heard; the hopes which seemed quenched for ever were re-lumed, and from that hour to this the first promise has been in course of fulfilment. Its gentle voice might appear to be drowned amid the thunders of Sinai; and at ten thousand places, or ten thousand occasions, men may have seemed without hope. But when David seized his harp, and sang, "The Lord is my shepherd;" when David's Lord first exclaimed, "Lo, I come," and then added, "It is finished,"—the promise of Eden was fulfilled, and the hopes which arose somewhere near the

Euphrates and the Tigris became fruition near the Jordan and the Kidron.

But they are becoming fruition more and more; a power is now at work along the banks of the Tigris which is destined to upheave the corruptions which are there—God's truth is told. Opposite Diarbekir there stands the small village of Cutturbal, dark and neglected, like hundreds of places besides. But at the former there are Christians, humble but devoted, who have been won to the Saviour by the endeavours of American missionaries. One of their converts, pitying his countrymen, waded in secret across the Tigris, animated solely by Christian love, with his New Testament in his hand, and read and spoke of the Redeemer of the lost; and already a church of fifty souls has been gathered in by a blessing from on high upon such loving, such devoted, though humble labours. When that spirit shall pervade the churches, the banks of the Tigris will bloom with a new beauty, and men will be guided on to the Eden which can never be lost.

3. THE CHEBAR.

ONE of the prophets of God was favoured with such glorious visions beside this stream that it should not be passed over in a description of the Lakes and Rivers of Scripture.

Ezekiel tells us (i. 1) that while "he was among the captives by the river of Chebar, the heavens were opened, and he saw visions of God." And a subsequent verse (3)

adds that that took place "in the land of the Chaldeans." In another chapter the prophet says that he dwelt among his captive brethren "by the river of Chebar, and sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days" (iii. 15). In that region, then, the glory of the Lord appeared to the prophet, and his visions and disclosures rank among the grandest ever made to mortal man. It is difficult to explain them all; but the sights with which Ezekiel was favoured "by the river of Chebar," when "he saw the living creature under the God of Israel" (x. 20), were such as not merely sustained the captive seer, but have gladdened myriads since.

Where, then, was this Chebar in the land of the Chaldeans? Upon its banks a colony of Jews was placed by Nebuchadnezzar when he was employed as the sword of God (Ps. xvii. 13) to chastise the idolatrous Jews. Manasseh had filled the land with blood. King after king had set up and worshipped idols, and the King of Babylon, with other enemies, was sent to rebuke these transgressions. When Jerusalem was captured a great deportation took place, and at least some of the Jews were located by the Chebar (2 Kings xxiv). It is commonly believed to be the same as the Hobar, or Gozan, a river of some magnitude which rises among the mountains of Armenia and falls into the Tigris in the neighbourhood of Nineveh. Others, however, discard that opinion, and prefer to regard the Nahr Malcha, or Royal Canal, which joins the Euphrates and the Tigris near Bagdad, as the Chebar; and this opinion is upheld by two considerations. First, the

name Chebar is connected with a word which means great, and any great supply of water may be described by it; and secondly, the captives may have been employed in constructing or repairing the canal. But different from both of these is the view which regards the Chebar of Ezekiel as that river which the Greeks knew as Chaboras; which is now called Khabour, and which flows into the Euphrates through Mesopotamia. It is increased by the waters of another stream about equal to itself, and enters the river at Kerkesia—believed to be the Carchemish of the Bible.

It hence appears that there are three classes of claimants for the Chebar: first, those who incline to regard it as the Nahr Malcha; secondly, those who view it as the Gozan, or some other tributary to the Tigris; and thirdly, those who argue that it is “without doubt” the Chaboras. If we adopt the first of these views, then the Chebar has already been described. If we adopt the second view, we must trace the Chebar upwards through Kurdistan, and among wild recesses, some of which are rarely trod by the feet of mortals, scarcely ever by an European. To visit that region would lead us into some of the wildest scenes in the world, and make us familiar both with men and mountains, as well as with homes and habits which might satisfy us once more that there are far more things on earth than are dreamt of by the fireside traveller. Again, if we adopt the third opinion, that the Chebar is represented by a tributary of the Euphrates, that also would lead us into regions of wildness and beauty, where there are copious streams, abundant harvests

in the plains, and sterile grandeur upon the mountains. Those uplands have been rarely explored, and never without rewarding the adventurous wayfarer with sights not previously supposed to exist. Far to the north-east, for example, and beyond the Tigris, there are scenes which Gosse thus describes: "The effect is heightened by the contrast of exuberant fertility and beauty with the stern and rugged grandeur of the mountain-sides that form the back-ground of the picture; while in the plain, the willows, poplars, and sycamores by the water-courses, and the groves of fruit trees, the peach, apple, pear, quince, apricot, plum, and cherry, together with the luxuriant vineyards, give to large sections the appearance of a rich and variegated forest." At one place there is a lake five thousand feet above the level of the sea, yet so salt that no fish can live in it—it seems another Sea of Sodom. The flamingo, with her beauteous garb of crimson, adds to the attractions of the region—indeed, it appears to embosom beauties such as we of the West had not supposed to exist. Up on the mountains are the snows of winter; down in the valleys, the fig, the olive, the mulberry, the pomegranate, and a thousand plants in bloom, or trees in fruit, make us wonder that so few have resorted to those scenes. The bear, the antelope, the ibex, and other animals roam through the oak forests, or wander over mountains where man attempts in vain to pursue them. Those who have followed Layard in his adventurous enterprises, or Dr. Grant in his visits to the Nestorians, know that the Kurds, the Nestorians, and the Yezidis inhabit these parts. Up

thither some tribes of the Jews were deported, and the borders of the river Gozan, with several cities in its vicinity, are spoken of as the place of their exile. It is supposed by some that the ten tribes who revolted from Solomon's successor were located in this region when they were vanquished by Esarhaddon and carried away prisoners from Samaria and other places—the result of their idolatries and consequent alienation from the God of truth.

Such, then, were some of the scenes amid which that God partially lifted up the veil, and let Ezekiel see into the future. This is not the place to expound those symbolic creatures which the prophet saw, or the visions which opened on his wondering eyes as the appearance first of a man, then of a lion, next of an ox, and finally of an eagle was presented. But add to all this the abominations which he was carried to witness in Jerusalem, and the woe which was coming on his people, and such things cannot fail to invest the Chebar, wherever it is, with such attractions as only truth and the presence of the God of truth can impart. Perhaps we are warranted to say, that like John in Patmos, Ezekiel was allowed to scan in outline much of the world's history in connection with the apostate but still beloved people; and these things being so, they clothe the streams and the mountains of Assyria, or of Chaldea, with a glory which shall finally fade only when the world shall be wrapt in its winding-sheet of fire.

4. THE ULAI.

In Dan. viii. 2, we read that the prophet "saw in a vision when he was by the river of Ulai." He was in the palace at Shushan, and the river, as some believe, washes that city. Its modern name is Kerah, and it is formed by the confluence of many streams far up in Kurdistan. Flowing through the plain of Kermanshah, after receiving many affluents, the Ulai hastens to enter the Shat el Arab, or the combined rivers of the Euphrates and the Tigris, about twenty miles below Korna where they unite. It should be noticed, however, that other rivers claim to be the Ulai of Daniel. Some authors set aside the Kerah, and prefer the Abzal, which rises in Irak and falls into the Persian Gulf after being reinforced by several other streams. Dizful, on its borders, is a place of twenty thousand inhabitants; and the river is there about three hundred yards wide, and spanned by a bridge of two and twenty arches, indicating a magnitude in the stream which might plead for its claim to be the Ulai, unless the topography of the region contradicts it.

The chief interest which gathers round the Ulai, the Choaspes of antiquity, is that it waters Shushan, made famous for ever by the doings of Esther. It was of old a capital of Persia. Its modern name is Susa, and it is the chief town of Susiana, which is described as being now a gloomy wilderness, the resort of lions, hyenas, and other beasts of prey. The village of Shus is supposed to mark the spot where the winter palace of

Ahasuerus stood, for there are mounds and ruins there, spread over a district perhaps twelve miles in length. Broken bricks and fragments of coloured tiles encouraged the thought that these mounds were the tombs of palaces, and modern enterprise has proved the conjecture true. Shushan, Susa, Sus or Shush, may now be as familiarly known as the remains of Tintern or of Netley Abbey. Its halls have been excavated and ransacked. Plans of its palaces have been formed, and the Ulai now murmurs past the upturned remains of ancient art and splendour.

The history of this remarkable city deserves to be glanced at. The first historical reference to it dates from the year 650 B.C.; and about the year 560 B.C. it passed into the power of Cyrus, was richly embellished by the Persian kings, and became the rival of Nineveh. Queen Esther, as we have seen, was here raised to a throne to do a great work in the days of Ahasuerus, who is supposed by some to be the same with Xerxes, who made Shusan a treasure city, depositing there the spoils of Delphos and of Athens. Alexander the Great found silver at Shushan to the value of £17,500,000,* and so rich was the place reputed to be, that the possession of Shushan was said to make a man a rival for Jupiter.

The chief ruins are about three miles and a half in circumference. The mounds are huge, and cuneiform inscriptions have been discovered upon fragments of obelisks, at a place deemed the citadel of the ancient

* Some raise these treasures to the value of £274,000,000 sterling, besides stores of jewels and vessels of gold and silver.

capital. The wild animals already mentioned are but a portion of those which now prowl here, for besides them, leopards, wolves, lynxes, foxes, jackals, the wild ass, and bears, are all tenants of the region. They prowl and prey where sumptuous palaces, with their groves of date palms, lemon trees, and other Oriental productions, once stood.

The remains of the palace which has lately been uncovered, and in plan reconstructed, are a rival for Persepolis itself. "The garden of the king's palace," the "pillars of marble," and other things, may still, according to Mr. Loftus, be traced at Shushan. The debris of fallen grandeur is, no doubt, a sad and dreary tomb for man's boasted greatness; yet Fancy and Conscience, hand in hand, love to roam among these forests of pillars, overturned to their bases, and to read in the fall of Shushan the fall of everything that exalts itself against God. The glory of the place was destroyed by fire, perhaps by Alexander the Great; and some of the discoveries of shameless abominations made among the ruins, tell too plainly that the place was ripe for overthrow. The being—man—who was formed for the enjoyment of something more than the vast, even the Infinite, attempted here, as in ten thousand other places, to satisfy the soul with material things, and perished in the attempt. He sought glory and found a grave. Surely the men who could plan and rear such majestic piles were destined for nobler pursuits than some of their relics would lead us to suppose they followed. But while we wander on the banks of Daniel's Ulai, amid the wreck and the debris of palaces, temples,

and tombs, we are again, and again, and yet again reminded of the united puniness and majesty of man—that singular compound of Deity and dust.

Though the region be salubrious, it is not very productive, except by the margin of the rivers. The sugar cane is cultivated, and other tropical plants are not uncommon.

This glance at Shushan would be even more imperfect than it is did we omit to say that the reputed tomb of Daniel is found at Susa, and is a place at once of Jewish and of Moslem superstition. Some are disposed to give credit to the tradition which makes this the resting-place of the great prophet's dust—but if so, it is scarcely worthy of its object. The sacred pile is found shrouded amid date palms, and rises with a conical spire above most of the surrounding objects. The monument in the adytum is merely a slab of polished cement. A few miserable lamps, and similar pieces of furniture, all as filthy as Eastern habits can make them, are the only decorations which are there; but the cone-shaped spire is not inelegant. Seven invisible but sleepless lions are believed to guard the place; but such legends aside, one would willingly believe that while here, he is at the most not far from the dust of "the man greatly beloved," who "did the king's business." This tomb is washed by a river called by some the Abi-shapur, and deemed the true Ulai. But in truth there is unspeakable confusion on the subject of such identifications, and in many cases it is not probable that we shall ever reach more than bare and often tantalizing conjecture.

But it is *not* conjecture, it is revelation, that here Daniel was permitted to map down the future, and tell the things which were to be. From between the banks of the Ulai (Dan. viii. 16) he heard the explaining voice ; and the vision of beasts which had passed before him became an outline of the history of nations. Times and seasons were for once made known to man ; and that knowledge has been to many like a pilot on a stormy or a dangerous sea. The nations seem now preparing for some great events. Daniel's predictions and those of John in Patmos seem to be converging ; but the Lord will give light in his own time, and "blessed are all they that wait for Him."





XIII.

THE NILE.

THIS river is too closely connected with the people of the Bible, and with their early as well as their later history, to be entirely overlooked in an account of its waters. The Nile seems to flow through the course of the national existence of the Hebrews, very much as it flows through Egypt itself; and though we can only glance at the stream and its green, unutterably green, margins, even that glance may show us what great things have been there performed.

It appears that the real sources of the Nile are still unvisited. So recently as the year 1857, an expedition which had gone forth from Cairo to attempt the discovery was stopped at Meroë by Said Pasha; and we can therefore only conjecture, though upon very probable grounds, that its sources consist of two or more streams flowing from the mountains of Kombirat, about half a degree south from the equator.* A few degrees north it receives from the westward the tributary stream of the Misslad or Keilac, and from the east the

* Since the above sentences were written conjecture has been set aside by Captains Speke and Grant, who have proved that the Nile has its source in a vast lake called the Victoria Nyanza, more than two degrees south of the equator.

Saubat. About fifteen hundred miles from its source, or at Khartoum, it is joined by the Blue Nile ; a few miles farther down it receives the waters of the Atbara, or Abara ; and thence it flows onward through Nubia, to the first cataract, and enters Upper Egypt at Assuan. Traversing both Egypts it falls into the Mediterranean below Cairo, by the Damietta and Rosetta branches, after a course of twelve hundred geographical miles from the junction of the Abara.

The name Nile is unknown in our Scriptures, "the River of Egypt" being substituted for that name where it occurs in the Hebrew. It is well known that the periodical rains which fall within the tropics annually raise the waters of the Nile, and spread a fertility as abundant as in the days of old. After the subsidence of the waters, the valley, which is rarely more than a few miles in width, speedily begins to wear the appearance of a fertile garden. Groves of fruit trees, and flowers of every hue, the palm tree, and others peculiar to Oriental climates, add to the general beauty ; and the well watered garden becomes indeed a granary for the nations. The harvest is gathered in March and April, and so entirely dependent is the region on the sediment of the Nile for fertility, that at the distance of a few feet from the spot which the waters reach all is arid sterility.

The current of the river is commonly not more than three miles in an hour, if so much. An elevation of sixteen fathoms is necessary to secure the prosperity of the country. The water is carried over the land by canals as well as by natural channels ; and it is blue when

the river is low, dark and muddy when it is swollen, but salubrious to drink at all seasons. During the inundation the country is one vast lake studded with islands; and so rich are the blessings scattered by the Nile, that some scarcely wonder that it has been worshipped as a god.

In very early ages the land of the Nile was visited on account of its fertility (Gen. xii. 10); and the different kinds of produce which were found there amply betoken its riches. Corn and wine; onions and garlic; beans, pumpkins, cucumbers and melons; flax and cotton, are enumerated among its productions; while the acacia, the sycamore, the palm, the carob, the tamarisk, and the fig tree added to its beauties. Its river abounded in fish: the papyrus grew upon its banks, where the crocodile and hippopotamus lurked. Horses were common: the bull was the chief god of Egypt. There were gold mines in Upper Egypt; and several places of Scripture indicate that the war chariots of that land were formidable, as well as skilfully managed, in battle (Isa. xxxi. 1; Ezek. xvii. 15). But amid such advantages Egypt had its constant as well as miraculous plagues: leprosy and small pox, locusts, frogs, and mosquitoes, torment the Egyptians still. Yet the fellahs of Egypt are said to love their country and their river so intensely, that to be removed from them is like being doomed to death. "Their grave must be where their cradle was."

"The wisdom of the Egyptians," as well as their treasures, was a proverb of old, and modern investigations have borne out these traditions. Knowledge and wisdom

spread from Egypt westward, and Greece was in some respects a scholar to the sages of the Nile. It is not our object, however, to present any outline of such acquirements, and still less to consider the too problematical information derived from the study of hieroglyphics. Enough to have adverted to these, or even to the discoveries made in some of the tombs. In a temple at Karnac, for example, a piece of mural sculpture represents a king presenting his god with some captives who are obviously Jews. The king is said in the accompanying hieroglyphics to be Sheshenk (Shishak), and the chief captive is declared to be king of Judah. In as far as this agrees with the Jewish history it is an interesting coincidence; but do such meagre results reward the toil and the struggles of decipherment? Have men's hopes been realized or disappointed there?

It is well known that it was on the banks of the Nile that the Hebrews first became a people. Egypt, indeed, has been called their mother country. The story of Joseph, and all the incidents which cluster round that most picturesque portion of the past, introduce us to our earliest very authentic knowledge of Egypt; and in that land of colossal buildings, of obelisks and statues, of porticos and temples, of dead dynasties and remorseless caliphs, of canals and various works indicating an advanced civilization, the descendants of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, were schooled for their high functions as a people. The solitary obelisk at On or Heliopolis was raised four thousand years ago at least, or about a century before Joseph was sold for a slave. It looked down, says Stanley, on his marriage, and it saw

the growth of Moses. But ever and anon we are reminded here that some of the antiquities which we admire, for example the Pyramids of Ghizeh, were antiquities to Joseph and to Moses. Amid these scenes the great Jewish lawgiver was born and marvellously preserved. There the Hebrews thrived and multiplied in spite of what seemed likely to crush or exterminate them. There plague after plague, sent on their behalf, indicated that Omnipotence was on their side; and no one can wander by the sedgy Nile or float upon its fertilizing waters, without having a hundred memories awakened, each proclaiming as its baffled magicians did of old, "This is the finger of God." Nearly two thousand years before Christ (1920) Abraham went down to Egypt during a famine, and there found the tokens of an advanced civilization. Indeed incident after incident shows that even then Egypt had risen to that condition to which only years, perhaps centuries, of commerce and culture could have brought any nation. The "treasure cities Pithom and Raamses," which the Hebrews, as slaves, were compelled to build, indicate further what Egypt was.* But the Exodus and its results threw a wide gulf between the slaves and their oppressors. Not till the days of David and his son (1 Kings iii. vii. ix.) were the two countries in amity again. But that amity became once more a snare,—“going to Egypt for help,” and turning away from the living God, was one of the besetting sins of

* The grandeur of old Egypt is indicated by this single fact: the colossal statue of Rameses has been thrown down, and so huge was the man that the Arabs have hewed millstones from his cheeks; and yet, after that dilapidation, enough remains to show what that head must have been.

the Jews. Successive kings, however, formed alliances with Egypt, or fought against it, as motives of safety or ambition dictated. Jehoahaz, king of Judah, for example, died a prisoner in Egypt. But the most memorable event connecting the Jordan and the Nile was the attempt to build a second Jerusalem in Egypt, for the Jews who dwelt in that land (B.C. 153). A ruined temple at Leontopolis was selected, and renovated for the purpose. A ritual similar to that at Jerusalem was introduced—a high priest was appointed. The establishment remained till the time of Vespasian; and thus the children of Israel, or many of them, sojourned once more in their “house of bondage.” It is well known, moreover, that the Redeemer found an asylum in the land of Egypt when he was driven from his own by the murderous Herod; and though we know only the fact of his sojourn there, and must discard the traditions to which it has given rise, as baseless fictions, we cannot forget that the skies of Egypt were once the canopy of the Deliverer who came out of Zion to turn away iniquity from Jacob.

It is not our design even to dip into the controversy regarding the antiquities of Egypt. The palaces, temples, and monuments of the country are among the most remarkable of all time. The obelisks and colossal statues, which were, for the most part, erected about the time of Rameses II., who is reckoned the Sesostris of the Greeks, rank among the wonders of the world. Monarch after monarch appears to have cherished a mania for architectural display, and the valley of the Nile is accordingly strewn with the remains of a grandeur to which the land of the Jordan has not the remotest pretension. Thebes

may be regarded as the centre of these monuments of the past. On both sides of the river they are found there in profuse abundance, and next to the Pyramids, Thebes supplies the most astonishing relics of Egyptian grandeur. Karnac, on the east bank of the Nile, contains a hall attached to a temple of which the length is three hundred and fourteen feet, and the width one hundred and sixty-four. The roof, which is formed of massive stone, is supported by one hundred and thirty-four columns, placed in sixteen rows, most of which are nine feet in diameter and forty-three feet high, while those in the centre are eleven feet six inches in diameter, and seventy-two feet high, with capitals twenty-two feet in diameter at the widest point. The decorations of this stupendous pile are all in keeping with its magnitude. Every spot on which the eye can rest—the walls, columns, architraves, and ceilings—is overspread with sculptures of gods and heroes. Yet all that grandeur formed but a portion of the colossal pile. Obelisks in granite, halls, quadrangles, and other fabrics, are spread over a space twelve hundred feet in length. Then, an avenue of colossal sphinxes led from Karnac to Luqsor, forming a vista about a mile and a half in length; so that we may safely regard these erections as among the most stupendous ever reared by mortal hands. The Coliseum at Rome is loftier, but after all it is the work of little men compared with the artistic or architectural prodigies of the Nile.

But this region is wonderful under ground as well as above it. The tombs of Beni Hassan date from the time of Joseph, or before it, and rank among the most

ancient in the land. The scenes represented there are gay and attractive, such as hunting, dancing, wrestling ; as if men could by such things rob Death of his sting. But the under-ground wonders culminate at Thebes, where the Catacombs take their place among the most amazing remains of antiquity. They are dug beneath the mountains which there limit the valley of the Nile. All around, fragments of mummies and relics of the dead greet the visitor as he approaches these silent abodes. The princes, the priests, and the warriors who once lay there in ghastly state are now rudely dragged from their resting-places, and the spectacle is such that some have wandered mute among the sad remains. The Catacombs penetrate far below the Libyan Mountains, and are so subdivided as to present the appearance of a city of the dead. Three thousand years have rolled away since they were used for burial, yet the tints of some of the paintings which are there appear to be as fresh as if they had been executed only yesterday. There are individual tombs, designed for royal dust, which measure from one hundred to upwards of four hundred feet in length. The roofs are supported by massive piers cut out of the living rock ; and not merely these royal graves with their sarcophagi and other appliances, but the multitudinous crypts of the more humble dead, render it no hyperbole to say that the whole scene is one of the wonders of the world. Excavation crowds upon excavation. Corridor links into corridor. The Queens' Valley is added to that where the dust of the Kings reposes, or at least was meant to repose, and the whole is utterly bewildering even to

those who have visited the scene with some expectation of beholding wonders there. It adds, however, a mixture of the grotesque to what is otherwise so solemn, to be told that in a remote corner the apes had a cemetery sacred to themselves, that their repose also might be in state!

"A world is buried here." Such is the record of one who once wandered among these remains of the past. It is computed, he says, that from eight to ten millions of human mummies were deposited in the Catacombs of this one city,—a number equal to the hundredth part of the entire living population of the globe; and his reflection on the spot may well be held in perpetual remembrance: "As I stood," he says, "upon the Libyan Mountains that overlook the plain of Thebes—which the wealth and the power and the religious sentiment of generations long since departed had perforated for miles, and had adorned with wondrous art for their place of sepulture, and with buried millions under my feet, and the desecrated tombs of kings on every hand, looking forth over the plain where once they dwelt in conscious power, and in its whole circumference of fifty miles saw only a few scattered villages of beggarly Arabs, and over the vast area of the ancient city saw only the four or five half-buried and shattered temples that mark its site—I felt the meaning of these words, 'ALL FLESH IS GRASS, AND ALL THE GLORY OF MAN AS THE FLOWER OF GRASS.'"*

Now let us bear in mind that similar excavations for similar purposes line the Valley of the Nile at many

* "Egypt, Past and Present," by Rev. Joseph P. Thompson.

points, and some idea may be formed of the countless multitudes sleeping there till the last awakening come. The tall palm tree may be scattered over the valley, rows of acacia may fringe the river, or a productiveness which appears exhaustless may be the result of the inundations and their annual alluvium; but amid all that is pleasing to the eye, one can scarcely visit the Valley of the Nile without a heavy heart. Man present is oppressed and victimized by the lordly despot; and man past has been laid in millions in tombs meant to be quiet resting-places, and honourable as quiet, but now rifled and empty—a pity rather than a glory. There are tokens of animation in the valley which even the memories of the past and the miserable mud huts of the present cannot utterly efface. The countless flocks of birds—the ibis, the hoopoo, the ziczac, the cormorant, the vulture, and others—help to vivify the desolation. But it is a sad spectacle, this grave of departed millions.

From such scenes, however, we must hasten away; but not without submitting the following account of a tomb called Belzoni's, because it was first discovered by that traveller. “Climbing,” one says, “for several hundred feet the face of the naked limestone mountain, you arrive at a doorway chiselled with architectural symmetry; and entering this, you immediately ascend twenty-four feet, by a flight of steps hewn from the rock, and then go forward for about a hundred feet by a series of passages, stair-cases, and small chambers, all cut with mathematical precision through the solid rock, and adorned on both sides with fine sculptures.

Next, you enter a hall supported by four pillars, cut true and smooth from the solid rock, and which, as well as the walls, are decorated with fine sculptures and painting, whose colours are yet brilliant. Then, by a succession of passages, you proceed to the grand hall, twenty-seven feet square, which is supported by six pillars, upon whose sides is represented the king in the presence of various divinities. From this you enter various side chambers, and a vaulted saloon nineteen feet by thirty, where the alabaster sarcophagus of the deceased monarch was deposited. All around this room is a divan of stone, some three feet high by as many deep. On either side of the grand hall is a staircase, descending a hundred and fifty feet into the heart of the rock, where the work of excavation was left unfinished. The whole horizontal length of this excavation is three hundred and twenty feet, and the perpendicular ascent is one hundred and eighty feet. Its sculptures are very fine, and in excellent preservation." Such are some remains of a land which was great and learned when Abraham made it the place of his temporary sojourn and Joseph his descendant ruled it as its viceroy.

But the Pyramids remain to be glanced at. The mystery in which they were long shrouded has been at length cleared away. They are the Catacombs in another form; they are man's substitute for immortality. These stupendous tombs are of different sizes, but the Great Pyramid of Ghizeh, near Memphis, stands upon a base seven hundred and forty feet square. It required, say some, the labours of three hundred and

sixty-six thousand men for twenty years to rear it; and though the hand of Vandal spoilers has often been lifted up against it, its symmetry and its mass have defied their assaults. The masonry of that one structure has been estimated at six millions of tons, and covers an area of thirteen and a half English acres; while the cost, at a moderate estimate, was about £5,000,000 sterling. The perpendicular height was four hundred and eighty feet, or forty-three feet higher than St. Peter's Church at Rome, and one hundred and ten higher than St. Paul's in London.

We have merely caught a glimpse of the Nile, that we might not wholly pass by that wondrous stream, so surely a river of the Bible. All along its margin there are tokens of man's mingled majesty and meanness, such as no other stream can match;—not the Euphrates, with its Birs Nimroud; not the Tigris, with its colossal ruins now disinterred; not even the Jordan. And all that is proved by the fact is, that tombs, tombs, tombs, are, next to the river itself, the most striking of all the characteristics of the Nile Valley. They look down upon the fertilizing river from the unchanging mountains that guard it, and once contained the remains of the Pharaohs and of some of the mightiest potentates under whom the world ever groaned. But these proud resting-places are rifled and desecrated now. They are retreats for robbers, not cities of peace for the dead; and nowhere on earth could we find a more perfect antidote to human ambition than on the banks of the Nile, could such things be an antidote at all. It has often been quoted as a notable stroke

of wit in the greatest of all dramatists, when he spoke of the dust of Alexander the Great supplying the clay which stopped the mouth of a beer barrel; but in the Valley of the Nile dust once as renowned as his may be found employed in still more ignoble ways. It is hawked through some of the towns for sale to travellers from far-off lands; and the mummy which was meant to be embalmed for ever is turned into a jest, or a thing of vulgar merchandize. While such things help to verify the word of Him who predicted that, in spite of all its grandeur of old, Egypt would become one of "the basest of the nations," they also turn the Valley of the Nile into one of the scenes where reflection is painful, for man's sad portion is there written up in words of light. Egypt, indeed, is a majestic epic in itself. Its Memnonium may be mute, though some would persuade us that it still salutes the rising sun with sounds subdued; but the whole land is a mighty Memnonium, mournfully proclaiming what man becomes when the Eternal is disowned, and his creatures put in his place.

That is the conviction with which a believer is most deeply penetrated as he lingers in the valley. Man could build these massive and majestic structures; but all the while he was bowing down before an ox as his god! Man could carve the sculptures or chisel the colossal statues of Karnac or of Luqsor; but at the very same time his divinity was a cat! Man could plan and execute that vista, a mile and a half in length, which seems to fatigue even Ruin; and yet an ape, or perhaps a crocodile, was adored by the people who

constructed it! Man could lay on colours which have remained untarnished perhaps for four thousand years; but the being who was so exquisitely skilled in material things was ignorant of the God who gave him all his gifts! Man could rear the Pyramids; but his soul did not soar higher than their apex. There might be exaggeration in the saying of the Roman, that an old Egyptian had only to walk into his garden to find his god, for he worshipped some of the vegetables which flourished there; but nowhere on earth is the saying more loudly proclaimed,—“The world by wisdom knew not God.”

It should be noticed, however, that in wandering by the Nile the Christian can gather still other illustrations of his Bible. For example, Joseph was made steward at one stage of his eventful history; and the steward with his books is represented on many of the conspicuous tombs. He employed a cup in divining; and divining cups are also indicated on some of the tombs. The gift of a gold chain, such as Pharaoh gave to Joseph, was a common Egyptian practice, if we may judge from the pictures of old Egypt which still remain. Such store-houses for grain as Joseph built are represented in tombs of his times. We read in Genesis that Joseph and his brethren *sat* at table,—that is, their custom was different from that which prevailed in most other Eastern lands; and in the pictures of feasts represented in those exhaustless studies, the tombs, the guests are seen sitting, not reclining. Again: we are told that Jacob was embalmed and buried with great mourning; and it is too well known to need to be

more than mentioned that embalming was the common mode of entombing in Egypt.

Further: according to the Bible, it was the practice to make bricks with straw; and chopped straw is found in the bricks which still remain. Moses was launched on the Nile in an ark of bulrushes daubed with bitumen; and it was common to construct mummy cases in the same manner. The daughter of Pharaoh found the exposed infant when she went to bathe; and on one of the tombs there is found the picture of a female bathing attended by four maids: and such practices are not Oriental, but Egyptian.* It is well known that Pharaoh pursued the Hebrews with an army of chariots and horsemen; and in some of the battle scenes which are represented on the relics of Egypt such chariots are common. Lastly, Miriam, soon after the escape from the land of bondage, rejoiced with timbrels; and these were Egyptian instruments of music. Indeed this list might be indefinitely prolonged. The excavations and discoveries made on the banks of the Nile shed fresh illustrations on the word of God; and, like the tributaries which feed and swell and aggrandize a river, these side-lights at once make Revelation more life-like and its history more manifestly veritable, while they leave its assailants less excuse for their unbelief.

* Thompson's "Egypt, Past and Present."





CONCLUSION.

1. RELIGION IN THE LANDS OF THE BIBLE.

IN wandering over these Lands of the Bible, and tracing the course of their rivers as far as they are known, we have not said much of the religion which is now ascendant there. It is Islam. It is well known that the Mosque of Omar and other Moslem piles now occupy the site of the Temple of Jerusalem; and from that centre to the remotest hamlet of Palestine, nay, of Persia itself, the creed of Mohammed may be said to be paramount. There *are* people called Christians at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, and other places. The Greek and Papal superstitions seem to contend which shall do most to bury the truth of God below the legends and inventions of men, and his worship beneath graven images. And as the Bible is a proscribed book, idolatry is rampant,—relics are adored, as if each were a god and could bless its worshippers. From such abominations Mohammedans flee with a horror which they reckon holy; and in all the regions to which we have referred their creed prevails. Jews, Christians nominal and Christians real, are trodden down and oppressed by the dominant race. The past and the

present combine to show that they spurn and despise, they plunder and they massacre without compunction, when fanaticism excites their thirst for infidel blood. The lawless habits of those wild men doom their country in a great measure to neglect—for who would of choice associate with brigands? and the other peoples to misery—for who can be happy with death in the most violent forms constantly hovering near?

A single incident relating to the land may indicate the tone and spirit of Mohammedan rule in all the countries which it still debases. In the town of Safed, one of the four holy cities of the Jews, the people were found by some travellers in a state of great alarm. The troops of the pasha had been withdrawn from the place, and the neighbouring Bedawin—Moslems all—were threatening to attack and plunder the place. Only four soldiers were left for a guard, and these, with the Jews, formed a night patrol for defence, or rather for alarm, in case of an assault. Most of the Jews were poorly clad; and it was understood that they had buried their money and all they reckoned precious in the earth, to escape from pillage at the hands of their lawless neighbours. The Jews were, indeed, precisely in the condition which had been predicted by Moses three thousand years before, when he said, “The Lord shall give thee a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: and thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life.”

Now the situation of Safed is beautiful exceedingly. The high land of Naphtali, verdant to the summit,

calmly greets and refreshes the eye. A fine undulating vale is stretched out below, and pleasant groves of olives and vineyards supported by terraces cover the slopes. But though the country is beautiful the people are wretched; the followers of an alien and a hated faith hold them in grinding bondage.

And so wherever the Turk and Islam rule. What, then, is the remedy for all this woe? The open Bible—God the Saviour welcomed—God the Creator known in Him—God the Spirit hallowing. There is no other hope. Wherever the principles which are disclosed in the Bible are ascendant, men are free, progressive, happy. Wherever these principles are either denied or ignored, men are sunk in wretchedness. Witness Ireland, witness Italy,—witness all the East. At this moment, and for many centuries, all the Lands of the Bible have lain under the upas or the night-shade influence of Islam; and the only remedy, we repeat, for all their degradation is just the open Bible, or the open pathway from heaven to earth, and back from earth to heaven. Let the minds of men be illumined by the truth of God, or touched by his love, or taught to feel his holiness, and all that Inspiration has recorded will yet, in the fulness of time, be realized. The Greek and the Latin superstitions would equally vanish before an open Bible, while the promise made to the Father of the Faithful amid those Armenian uplands at which we have glanced would be fulfilled. All nations would begin to call God blessed in the Redeemer. We repeat it therefore again, and again, and yet again—the remedy for the woes which press upon the land where

our race was cradled, and where our religion was first taught, but whence it is now for the most part scornfully banished, is the Bible and the Son of God. With Lebanon in a blaze by reason of hatred to the very name of Christian—for Christians there have little more—the prospect may be dark; there may scarcely be a streak of light through the cloud. Yet the Lord reigneth; and a nation may be born in a day.

“ Thus hast thou lain for ages, iron-bound
As with a curse; thus art thou doomed to lie,
Yet not for ever,”

is at once a description of the past and the present and a prediction of the future, in those lands of the sun which Islam has changed into lands of wide-spread spiritual death.

2. THE FERTILITY OF PALESTINE.

Frequent reference has been made to the ruins which crowd the Messiah's Land, and it has been seen that wherever we wander, from the southern slopes of Hermon and the hills of Naphtali in the north to the neighbourhood of Beersheba in the south, tells and green mounds, with shapeless, nameless, dateless masses of ruin, sadly and everywhere proclaim the decay which has swept over Palestine; the havoc wrought not merely by wars and feuds, but by what has proved more wasting still—namely, Turkish misrule. The country has long been in that condition in which men are afraid to plough, for they must resort

to the field sword in hand ; or to sow, for it is not likely that the hand which scatters the seed will be allowed to reap the produce.

But, amid all these hinderances to improvement, nothing can repress the productiveness of the land. It is, in truth, a phenomenon in the world's history. Wherever there is moisture and earth there is rank vegetation. The ground that was parched and arid when the sun went down may begin to be clothed with living green ere that sun arise, if rain has fallen to moisten it ; and in the same way, every spot where water is perennial rivals the "Diamond of the Desert" in verdure. Not even the calcined shores of the Dead Sea, nor the regions which glow like an oven at some other places, can repress the fertility, if moisture be at hand. Sychar, for example, is situated among copious brooks ; and such is the abundance which teems there, that the town is hid—it nestles unseen among verdure. At some seasons it lies in a blaze of blossoms, and is invisible till we are within a few hundred yards of its walls. It then slowly emerges from its green hiding-place with its graceful minarets and luxuriant environments, a very specimen of Oriental beauty. It is true, as we have seen, that when we enter the town the spell is broken, for the unseemliness of many a sight shocks the visitor. But the luxuriance of the almonds, the pomegranates, the vines, the figs, the mulberries, the apples, the oranges, the melons, the cucumbers, and other fruits, is so great that one wonders there should ever be poverty in Sychar. The bazaars are filled with piles of such fruits as have been named. Cotton is cultivated,

and rudely manufactured; so that if this one section of the land, including the valleys of Ephraim, were wisely governed and skilfully cultured, it might pour illimitable wealth into the lap of man. As it is, its vegetable products are carried as far as the markets of the capital.

Further: the hills of Ephraim, in the vicinity of Sychar, still furnish a favourable specimen of the system of terraces which once appeared on most of the hills in Palestine, and whose remains are still frequently visible. Not a yard of ground is ever lost, and wherever a plant will grow a plant is found. The vine and the fig tree entirely cover the terraces; and the sides of the hills are, in consequence, one waving mass of green. Wherever it is possible, corn is sown under the taller trees; and flowers of many hues bloom in unnoticed beauty wherever they are not overlaid or banished by the husbandman. The whole scene speaks silently but touchingly of the richness of the Redeemer's land, and increases our wonder at the physical ruin, in the wake of moral degeneracy, which has blighted too much of Syria.

The seasons, to a Western, are as strange as the vegetable affluence is remarkable. In the month of January the groves and meadows are all aglow with a blooming profusion of the anemone, the ranunculus, the crocus, the tulip, the narcissus, and the violet. Then the orange trees—especially along the sea-board, as at Sidon, Jaffa, and Gaza—load the air with the perfume of their blossoms, as they gladden the eye by their fruit, in all stages of growth upon the same tree. These constitute the chief charm of February, though

innumerable other trees and flowers are then putting on new beauties. In March, all the trees which we would call of the garden, but which in Palestine are rather of the forest, are in full foliage, and the apricot, the almond, the apple, and the pear clothe the plains with a peculiar beauty. Above them all, the stately cypress, not funereal at this season, but clothed in fresh bright green, towers and waves with a character unlike all the rest. At the same season the date-palm, which is an evergreen, puts forth its blossoms ; and the carob tree, which is supposed to produce the fruit or husks which the prodigal was fain to eat, perfects its fructification. Thus, amid such profusion of vegetable wealth, we see how truly this was “a goodly land,” a land which the great Giver had most amply blessed. In some of the eastern uplands, the arbutus, which is only a shrub in our country, takes its place beside the oak and the fir in imparting a forest aspect to the mountain-sides ; and this specimen may set forth the latent vegetating power of the land.

The effects of such luxuriance can scarcely be overstated. There are spots as remarkable for their sterility as other portions are for their verdure ; and the contrast there is peculiar—it acts like a charm. At the convent on Mount Sinai, for example, where everything outside the walls betokens superlative wildness, the result of some vast convulsion, the garden enclosed is a very oasis to look upon. The olive, the vine, the cypress, the apricot, and other trees are there ; and the green which clothes them has appeared to some the brightest of all possible tints—no doubt on account

of the contrast with the bare and blasted scenes around.

“ Things are not what they seem ; our hearts
Are like creators. As they feel,
They tip with sunshine, or they plunge in gloom ; ”

and as travellers arrive at that outpost of superstition at Sinai, one after another in substance records,—“ As I gazed upon these refreshing objects, I thought I had never before really felt and understood the charm of green as a colour ; all appeared so fresh, luxuriant, and cool, in the midst of the wilderness of savage granite by which it was surrounded.”

Scarcely less signal are the contrasts at other places : indeed in the compass of a single day’s march a traveller may witness the fervour of the tropics with the fertility which it evokes, and the aridity of the Zahara occasioned by intense heat operating on earth moist or dry in wadies, or plains, or mountain-sides. As an antidote, however, to the sterility, and in addition to the copious streams and fountains whose outflow at certain seasons occasions a joy similar to that of Egypt when the Nile overflows, the dews of Palestine are most abundant ; and in part they explain its rich productiveness. Some have found their tent as saturated with dew in the morning as if it had rained all night. The traveller is often wet to the skin. Others tell that their cloaks were sometimes as soaked with dew in the morning as if they had been immersed in the sea. And while these things explain the beauty and the blessedness of such assurances as that which says, “ I will be

as the dew unto Israel," they also explain why Palestine continues so fertile under the most superficial system of cultivation which has ever trifled with a soil charged to saturation with an exhaustless abundance. At some places, as on Carmel, whose name means "*the country of vineyards*," mere existence is a delight; and if paradise after paradise of flowers, forest after forest of oaks, and region after region of wheat, till the whole waves like the ocean under a breeze, could make man happy, the constituents of blessedness are all assembled there.

But instead of these general and desultory remarks, let us select a single instance, and let it be "the excellency of Carmel," to illustrate the fertility of the land.

This hill, then, is about fifteen hundred feet high, and at some points rises directly out of the Mediterranean. At certain seasons it is covered with verdure. Hyacinths, jonquils, anemones, and other flowers, bloom in wild profusion on the mount. Olive and laurel trees grow on the slopes. Pines and oaks cover the summit. Where groves exist they are luxuriant; and the brooks which hasten down to join the Kishon deepen and perpetuate the fertility. Solomon, then, selected no unbecoming emblem for the Bride in his "Song," when he pointed to the green beauties of Carmel (vii. 5).

But there is wildness here as well as beauty. High precipices at some points dip down into lovely glens, where the wandering rivulet spreads perpetual verdure. In such vicinities flocks are still as numerous as in the

days of Nabal (1 Sam. xxv. 2); and the rich pasture on many parts of the mount enables us to understand the affluence of the land before the misery of misrule had smitten it with decay. Though there may be exaggeration in the words, they may be quoted once more in their application to Carmel: "Here, indeed, the plants, the rugged rocks, the moanings of the wind, the prospect of the ocean, the murmuring of the streams, the lowing of the herds, the gambols of the flocks, the singing of the birds, the delightful clime, the variety of flowers, the odour of the aromatic herbs—how they refresh the soul!"

But some of the productions most plentiful in Palestine may suffice, when considered singly, to set forth its beauty,—and let the pomegranate be selected. We are familiar with that tree and its fruit, at least by name, owing to the numerous references which are made to it in the Old Testament. It is one of the most refreshing and at the same time one of the most common trees in Palestine, while its singular beauty explains why it ranked among the ornaments of the first Temple. It rises to the height of about twenty feet. The flowers are bell-shaped, and of a rich scarlet colour. The fruit, of a dusky brown tint, is larger in size than an *apple*; and the seeds or *grains*, which originate its name, are dried and used in cookery and medicine. The juice of the fruit is richly flavoured, and is much prized as a welcome refreshment in that land of the sun. With the pomegranate may be ranked the oleander, which grows in some parts of Palestine in marvellous profusion, flushing the landscape with

beauty, and appearing like pyramids of blossom, which are sometimes twenty feet in height. On the banks of the Jordan, at the head of the Sea of Galilee, among the ruins of Petra, indeed everywhere in the land called the Holy, the rose-bay abounds; and whether we are to regard it as some do, as "the tree of the righteous" mentioned by David, or with others as the willow on which the Jews at Babylon hung their harps, it is a beauty often described by all who have visited Palestine.

Such, then, are specimens of the profuse fertility of Palestine. An hundred-fold was no uncommon return to the husbandman when the season was crowned with plenty. But modern inquiry has gone farther and assured us that four hundred-fold have been the returns in some cases, indicating a latent power of production ample enough to sustain ten times the present population of the land. And is this in harmony with Revelation upon the subject? Does the Inspired Book so describe Palestine as to warrant us to expect such exhaustless affluence as has just been mentioned? Yes; and here if ever does the Mighty One open his hand to satisfy the wants of every living thing. The whole of the Old Testament bears evidence to the immense productiveness of the land. To extract the references to that subject would be to epitomize many a passage, and that were superfluous. The corn, the vine, the fig-tree, the olive and the date, with a hundred others, all imparted their affluence; and though changes in climate and in culture may have modified the fertility, it is *only* modified, not destroyed. When He

shall have come whose right it is to rule, a resurrection will take place in Palestine. The long entombed will come forth in beauty and abundance again. Men shall once more "suck honey from the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock." He who spake of old "to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken," will speak once more, and at length what is now "a wilderness will become a fruitful field." The olives, the figs, the pomegranates, the vines, the myrtle, the woodbine, the holly, the oleander, the passion-flower, mint, thyme, and all odorous things blending their perfumes, will not always waste "their sweetness on the desert air." The eye which now roams over a single region, and sees three hundred and forty-five ruins scattered over its surface, may well suggest both sorrow and amazement. But the truth of God is still more enduring than the fertility of Palestine, and He will yet do all His pleasure there.



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